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Barriers To The Evaluation Of Human Resource Management Initiatives: Three Public Sector Case Studies.

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy on 17.11.00.

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Abstract

In the context of Human Resource Management (HRM), organisations have been increasingly encouraged to implement a range of practices which, it is argued, will improve their competitiveness in the global market place. Thus, change initiatives within organisations follow one after the other. Yet, although there is apparent *acceptance among practitioners and academics that evaluation is a crucial step in any process of continual improvement* the reality is often that little has been done to assess the impact and degree of success of each initiative before organisations progress to the next. However, despite wide acknowledgement within the literature that is a significant problem there are few explanations offered and little evidence of any in-depth empirical exploration of the issues involved.

This thesis reports on a study which sought to identify and explain the factors which created barriers to evaluation. Using a case study approach the research explored the reality of the evaluation process as it occurred in three UK public sector organisations, each of which was seeking to evaluate a Human Resource Management (HRM) change initiative. Two distinct types of barrier were found to exist which were labelled primary and secondary. As anticipated, there were barriers (secondary) that arose during an evaluation process that related to the choices made about purpose, process and responsibility and which made it difficult for 'good' (thorough, unbiased, relevant) evaluation to occur. However, of greater significance was the discovery in all three organisations of other factors (primary barriers) which, in combination, created a context in which the failure to undertake formal evaluation could be justified as a reasoned, and reasonable, action on the part of managers thereby offering an explanation for why such evaluations are rare. These primary barriers relate to the organisational and individual value placed on the act of evaluating and the learning that occurs as a result of any findings, including the way that it informs the change. Among

those responsible for the initiation and implementation of the initiative (normally those who have control of the resources necessary to enable formal evaluation to take place), informal evaluation of the initiative and the context in which it occurred determined the perceived degree of need for formal evaluation to take place. Past experience, observation and shared perceptions suggested that formal evaluation activity was neither valued nor required by the organisation and was likely to have negative personal consequences. Matters are further clouded by an academic and practitioner literature which actively promotes the benefits of HRM strategies, supported by simplistic prescriptions for success, while the majority of empirical studies offer examples which substantiate these claims. In each of the cases reported here the nature of the chosen HRM initiative was assumed to be inherently good, something which would inevitably benefit the organisation in some way, by those responsible for its adoption and implementation thus making formal assessment unnecessary.

The research clearly identifies the complexity of the barriers; each type having its roots in different factors that need to be addressed in a variety of ways if they are to be overcome and thus enable the organisation to achieve the collective, and productive, learning from experience increasingly called for by the management literature. Until evaluation is valued at senior levels and accompanied by the necessary incentives, responsibilities, resources and rewards, wider perception of it as an important and valued activity is unlikely to become an active reality. Thus, the failure to learn from experience, to share understanding and to achieve both continuous improvement and greater levels of success in the management of change will continue. It is also clear that the same academic literature which is currently advocating a key role for HR and evaluation in the context of change needs to offer more in the way of information, guidance and support to make a positive contribution to the changes in perception that are required.

Acknowledgements.

As with any project that runs over a significant period of time, I have received help, support and encouragement in many different ways and from numerous people. My thanks are due to all of them, but in particular the value of the individual contributions made by each of my supervisors, Professor Reva Brown and Dr. Chris Mabey, needs to be recognised. Thanks are also due to the individuals within each of the case study organisations who gave so generously of their time and opinions and without whom this thesis would not exist. I would also like to acknowledge the steadfast support and guidance offered throughout this study by Dr. Jacky Holloway and Dr. Tim Clark and, in the later stages, by staff at University College Northampton, particularly Ian Brooks and Dr. Linda Hicks.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Throughout the 1990's organisations were faced with a turbulent business environment that was perceived to require constant change if competitive advantage was to be maintained and there seems little prospect that the situation will change in the twenty first century. Change initiatives follow one after the other as the pace of change increases and periods of stability are rare, yet, often little is done to assess the impact and degree of success of each initiative before organisations progress to the next. Owen & Lambert (1995) argue that to omit evaluation and reflection is to miss a key stage in the learning process and may well explain why organisations continue to make the same mistakes, despite the theories and prescription available in the literature. Yet, the explanations and degree of understanding offered by the management literature about why evaluation should be so problematic is limited and underpinned by little empirical research.

1.1. Overview of the Problem

1.1.1. Personal Perspective

Morse (1994, p. 220) suggests that a research question requires a fairly long term commitment and as such 'new investigators can best identify such a topic by reflecting on what is of *real* personal interest to them'. I had joined the world of academia after fifteen years as a public sector manager. The first research project that I undertook explored Human Resource Management (HRM) change strategies (Skinner and Mabey, 1997) and a finding which emerged from the study was that evaluation of such strategies was an area that received little attention within organisations. On reflection, I realised that this was also true within my own management experience, despite working in a sector that had been increasingly concerned with value for money, accountability and the protection of the 'public purse'. In various management roles, I

had been involved in a large organisation which had undergone substantial and continual change, yet, I could recall little thought being given to the evaluation of that change. This prompted me to wonder why evaluation, something so important in the context of learning from experience, was a problem, what were the disincentives or barriers that prevented it or made it difficult? Morse (1994, p. 221) also suggests that

Researchable questions often become apparent when one reads the literature. ... The discovery of a gap, of instances where no information is available, is an exciting indicator that a topic would be a good candidate for qualitative study.

An exploration of the management literature found limited coverage of the topic of evaluation, other than in the context of training programmes, and little that answered my questions.

1.1.2. The Academic Perspective

Much has been written about the necessary ingredients of successful change management and numerous prescriptions are proposed, many of which incorporate an evaluation stage. Commentators such as Mabey and Salaman (1995), Pettigrew and Whipp (1991), Senge (1990), suggest that organisations must have the ability to continually learn in a co-ordinated and progressive way, at both individual and organisational levels, if they are to cope successfully. An integral part of both effective change and effective learning is the reflection on experience - the assessment of process and outcomes which enables informed progression to the next stage, on the basis of experience.

Although much is written within management literature about change and Human Resource Management (HRM) initiatives and authors (for examples, see Hollinshead and Leat, 1995; Owen, 1993a; Salaman and Butler, 1994) recognise the importance of evaluation as part of the implementation process, not least as a precursor to further change (Patrickson *et al.*, 1995), it receives little detailed consideration. Yet, it is also widely recognised that evaluation is problematic and rarely done (Torraco, 1997).

Easterby-Smith (1986, p. 12) argued that 'a great deal of what passes for evaluation fulfils little more than a ritualistic function,' while Bramley (1991) noted that, even in the context of training and development, most evaluation is done at the 'reaction' level and the majority of organisations make no attempt to evaluate in terms of the benefits to the organisation. Nor, despite the recognition that little systematic evaluation is done (Tichy, 1983) particularly in 'soft' areas such as HRM, has much empirical work been undertaken to explore the reality of evaluation, the planned assessment of, and learning from, experience, as it occurs in organisations.

In 1975, Davis and Salasin said that the lack of dialogue between those specialising in *evaluation* and those in *organisational change* was *puzzling*, a situation which had not changed in 1993 when Wingens observed that there was still a paucity of thinking about how they might fit together. Within the literature, the active debates and extensive knowledge about the complexities of evaluation are primarily to be found within the fields of education and social sciences. There is little evidence of cross-fertilisation occurring with the management or organisational change literature. The result is that evaluation is included in change models with little indication of how it might be done and little guidance about the choices to be made or processes followed. Too often the impression given is that evaluation is the final stage, the add-on, which is of lesser importance than the preceding parts of the process. Yet, increasingly, management literature stresses the importance of learning within and by organisations as the only means of sustaining competitive advantage. To omit evaluation and reflection is to miss a key stage in the learning process and may well explain why organisations are still not effective in managing strategic HRM change and continue to make the same mistakes, despite the theories and prescription which are available in the literature.

1.2. Research Aims

The aim of this study was to identify the barriers to the evaluation of HRM initiatives that occur in organisations. Through observation of real evaluation processes the research sought to :

- Explore the nature of the barriers which arose
- Identify the factors which contributed to their creation
- Assess the impact that barriers had on the evaluation process
- Contribute to the understanding of evaluation as a key aspect of human resource and change management

1.3. Plan Of The Thesis

Although the reality of research process is often messy, involving a series of iterations and steps which move the project backwards as well as forwards, its presentation requires structure and coherence, if the evidence and conclusions are to emerge with clarity and credibility. The use of a fairly traditional thesis structure allowed the development of both the ideas and the literature that occurred throughout the life of the project to be reflected while maintaining the boundaries between the three different 'stories' and enabling a variety of perspectives to emerge. Within this framework the thesis was deliberately structured to reflect the progress of my personal journey and the emerging and incremental nature of my understanding, thus, the literature which informed the study at an early stage appears towards the beginning while the literature which was published towards the end of the study and informed the cross case comparison appears in that chapter. Similarly the case studies appear in the sequence in which they were undertaken and include references to any literature which specifically informed that period of analysis.

In more detail the chapter contents are as follows:

Chapter 2 discusses the literature which formed the backdrop to the research in its early stages. Views and debates on evaluation which are found in a number of disciplines (education, health and social policy) are considered in addition to the literature relating to HRM and change management. Key aspects of the evaluation process, together with a number of possible barriers are identified.

Chapter 3 considers the methodological foundations on which the research rests. The ontological and epistemological stances adopted are explained and their impact upon the research problem and design clarified.

Following Chapter Three there is an introduction to the case study chapters that explains the approach and conventions adopted.

Chapters 4 presents the evidence from the first case study, PVS, an organisation in the higher education sector which undertook the evaluation of a 'Fair Selection' initiative.

Chapter 5 discusses the evaluation of an organisation-wide empowerment initiative in ABC, a Government Agency.

Chapter 6 considers the evaluation of the first year of a mentoring scheme for new staff that took place in NJD, an educational establishment in a South Midlands town.

Chapter 7 reports on the findings which emerged from the cross-case analysis and proposes the existence of primary and secondary barriers to evaluation.

Chapter 8 draws the findings to a conclusion, discusses the implications of the study and its contribution to understanding the barriers to evaluation which exist within organisations.

Chapter 2 Evaluation, HRM And Organisational Change

Evaluation is a very common act, which takes place continuously in everyday life. Everything is subject to evaluation and, in fact, even the most ordinary of our deeds are constantly evaluated formally and/or informally by ourselves and/or others (Soumalis, 1977, p. 15)

2.1. *Introduction*

As thinking human beings, we can recognise the truth of this statement from our own experience yet it raises some significant issues for a deeper consideration of evaluation and its place in the management of change within organisations; the understanding of the term 'evaluation', the processes involved, the difference between formal (planned, organisational) and informal (instinctive/unconscious, individual) evaluation, the difference between evaluation conducted by ourselves and by others.

An understanding of the different beliefs and approaches that have developed in relation to evaluation reveals the complexity of choices and decisions faced by an organisation about to embark on any formal evaluation. Within this complexity lies significant potential for the creation of barriers. It is relevant, therefore, for this study to begin with some explanation of the development of evaluation and the views and debates which occupy those who are working and writing in relevant fields. The practice of evaluation has its origins in the field of education and, latterly, in health and social programmes, and it is here that the main body of literature is to be found. However, in the context of this research, it is also necessary to consider the relevant literature on the process of planned organisational change and the role of Human Resource Management (HRM), both of which, it has been argued, are key to the survival of organisations.

This chapter begins by defining evaluation and then considers the differing purposes and approaches which have been advocated as the field of evaluation has developed. The range of alternatives offered, and promoted, in the literature from the fields of education, health and social policy begins to explain the complexity of the choices which have to be made by anyone embarking on an evaluation process and therein some of the difficulties which need to be overcome. Issues involved in the identification of purpose, choice of model and design, the role of the evaluator, both in terms of the choices to be made and in relation to the various stakeholders present in any evaluation, and decisions about the use of findings are discussed. The barriers identified are then summarised. The remaining sections of the chapter considers evaluation and HRM in the context of change, as discussed within the management literature, and finds little reflection of the complex evaluation debates discovered elsewhere. However, some barriers to evaluation are identified and these are discussed. The final section of the chapter combines the findings from the different bodies of literature to summarise the potential barriers to evaluation that will be considered in the light of the empirical evidence which emerges from the case studies described in subsequent chapters.

2.2. *Evaluation*

This section considers the literature relating to evaluation as a formal field of practice and draws mainly on the debates to be found in the fields of health, education and social policy. The literature from these fields reflects the diversity and richness of thinking and practice that have led to the emergence of evaluation as a field in its own right.

2.2.1. What is Evaluation?

Guba and Lincoln (1989) argue that there is no right way to define evaluation and, in the context of the variety of methodologies and applications that have developed under the umbrella of evaluation during the last forty years, it would seem that this is a valid argument. However, this is not a productive stance for a consideration of evaluation literature in which some boundaries to inclusion have to be set in the interests of clarity.

In his consideration of the literature, Nevo (1986) groups authors on the basis of what he perceives to be the definitions of evaluation they subscribe to. An early view of evaluation represented by authors such as Alkin (1969) Cronbach (1963) and Stufflebeam *et al.* (1971), was as an activity for providing information for decision-making. Authors such as House (1980) and Scriven (1967) view evaluation in the sense of the dictionary definition of an assessment of value or worth, while Guba and Lincoln (1981) describe it as an activity comprised of both description and judgement. Patton (1990, p.11) offers a useful definition, which appears sufficiently broad to include the breadth of work in this area, describing evaluation as ‘any effort to increase human effectiveness through systematic data based inquiry’.

If we combine these definitions with Jamieson's (1984, p. 70) assertion that ‘to be an evaluator entails being employed by a sponsor to carry out a specific form of research’ we can broadly describe a *formal evaluation* as the planned investigation of the worth of something, which is instigated by an interested party. We can differentiate this from an *informal evaluation*, the term that will be used throughout this study to describe the process of evaluation that we, as individuals, are constantly engaged in and which is based on our own feelings, knowledge and values

We all evaluate, that is assess against implicit or explicit criteria, the value or worth of individuals, objects, situations and outcomes, informally and often unconsciously everyday of our lives. (Legge, 1984, p. 3)

The majority of the literature specifically concerned with evaluation focuses on activities that would be encompassed by formal evaluation, as defined above, and, as such, is primarily concerned with judgements and assessment of worth being made for, or used by, those in positions of power. The exceptions are those authors that argue for the participation of other stakeholders or who advocate goal-free evaluation. Yet, even these authors are primarily concerned with formal evaluation and there is limited consideration of the impact or consequences of any informal evaluation which may also be taking place.

2.2.2. The Development of Evaluation

The last forty years have seen a significant increase in the number of evaluation models available reflecting the variety of views held on methodology and this proliferation has led to a considerable array of possibilities for anyone wishing to undertake an evaluation. While there is a danger of oversimplification in any attempt to categorise the different models and approaches available some reduction of the complexity is necessary if the main themes relevant to this study are to emerge for consideration

The origins of formal evaluation are to be found within the movement to assess education in the USA which, like so much of the social sciences, responded to John Stuart Mills call to gain credibility through adopting the positivistic 'hard' science approach (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Early models that were advanced emphasised experimental approaches, standardised data collection and the provision of scientific quantitative data in the belief that it would provide incontrovertible evidence that programmes were successes or failures (Herman, *et al.*, 1987). These approaches were oriented towards an evaluation with the primary purpose of

contributing to decision making and the perceived objectivity and generalisability of findings and conclusions were, and still are, factors which often had a high degree of credibility with managers and decision makers. Guba and Lincoln (1989) refer to the progression of the evaluator's role from solely one of measurement to not only the collection of facts but also descriptions of strengths and weaknesses, albeit still within the positivist paradigm, as second-generation evaluation. This, it was argued, would enable the client(s) and the public to identify the value of the programme.

Critical debate during the 1960s and 1970s focused on the issue of the scientific approach to evaluation. Limitations inherent in the reliance on scientific quantitative paradigms of inquiry were identified, not least, that such evaluations were being insensitive both to local variations and to the richer picture of the political and social networks. The desirability of obtaining 'true' objectivity through context stripping (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) was challenged. The focus on selected sets of variables through appropriate controls as in a 'scientific' experiment, it was argued, excluded other variables that might exist in the real setting. This must inevitably have a significant effect on the findings and result in an unsatisfactory evaluation of an activity that involves the interactive processes of human beings where context is important. The need for judgements and values to be an integral part of the evaluator's role was increasingly argued, as was the need for any assessment of a programme to consider the goals as well as the processes (for examples, see Eisner (1979) and Guba and Lincoln (1981)). This led to the development that Guba and Lincoln (1989) describe as the third-generation of evaluation.

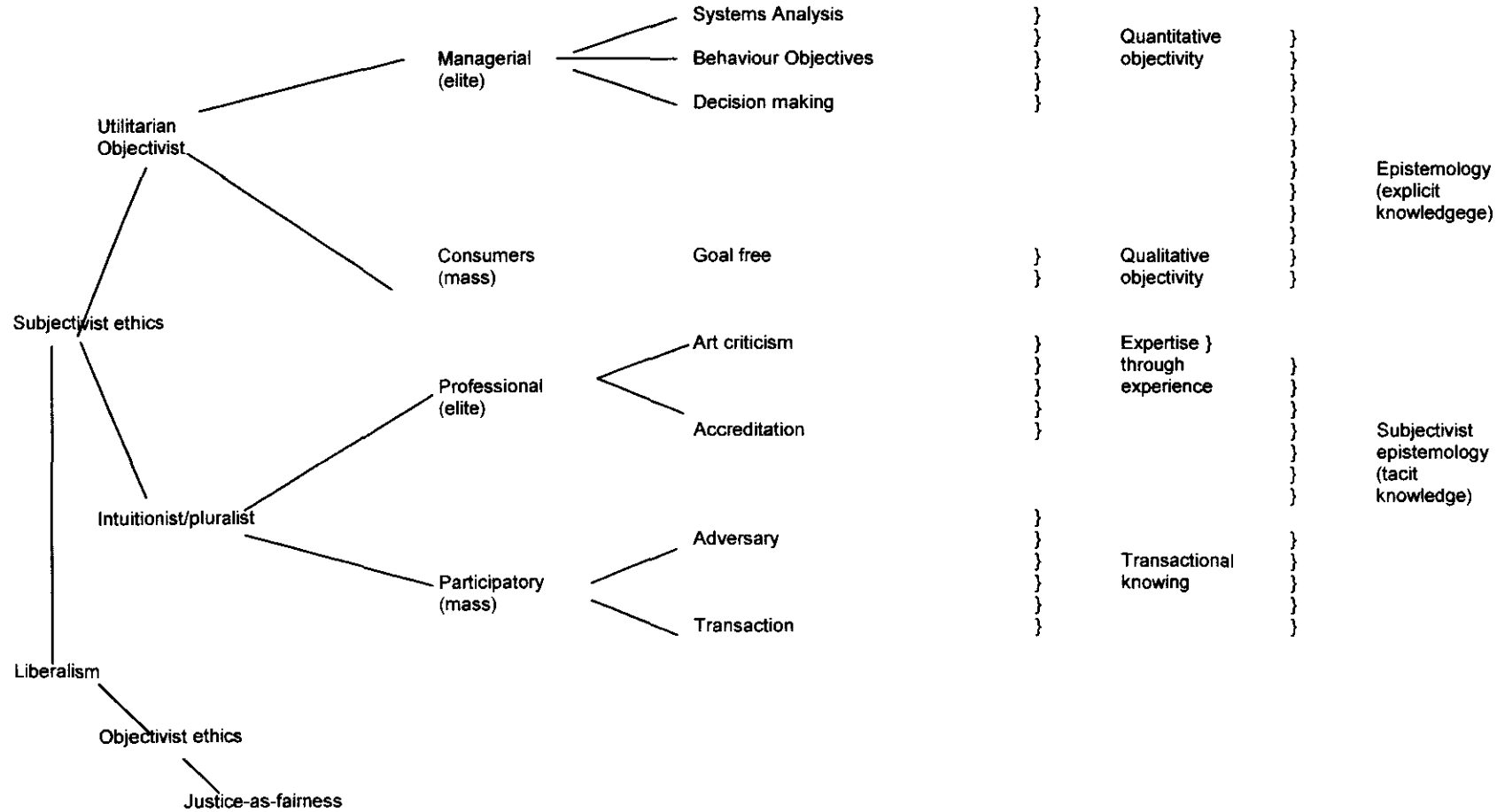
Scriven (1972) also challenged the focus on assessing the achievement of goals advocating goal-free evaluation wherein the evaluator deliberately avoids any consideration of the objectives of the programme being evaluated. Scriven offered a number of arguments in support of this including the difficulties of separating

alleged from actual goals and the lack of clarity or specificity common in stated goals that severely limit their usefulness. He also argued that knowledge of the objectives would actually serve to contaminate the evaluation introducing perceptual bias and limiting the evaluator's objectivity. Goal-free evaluation enabled the evaluator to focus on the actual effects and outcomes as experienced by the participants, only in this way could the evaluator avoid contamination by those with vested interests and make a balanced judgement about the value of what was being evaluated (Easterby-Smith, 1994).

The implication of this approach is that the evaluator assumes a position of power and becomes the central focus of the evaluation, with only the needs and requirements of the group responsible for the setting of the original programme goals, in effect those who have management and financial responsibility for it, being excluded. Certainly, in a business context, this is likely to be the same group who have responsibility for decisions about whether or not to evaluate, the *commissioning/funding of any evaluation and the use that will be made of the findings*. It is hard to imagine that they would willingly accept that they, and their success criteria, be excluded from the process.

A number of authors have attempted to draw together the different views on evaluation under various heading to aid clarification and understanding. House (1983) considers what he believes to be the assumptions underlying the various evaluation models and draws them together in a scheme (Figure 2. 1) which

Figure 2. 1 A Scheme Relating Major Evaluation Models to the Philosophy of Liberalism.



Source: House (1983, p. 49)

categorises major evaluation models in relation to the philosophy of liberalism arguing that the fundamental underlying idea is that of freedom of choice 'for without choice, of what use is evaluation?' (p. 49). Within this scheme, House places evaluation under a subjectivist heading on the basis that evaluation is intentionally context bound and seeks knowledge that is related to the particular experience of its audience. Yet, within that, he differentiates between utilitarian objectivist and intuitionist/pluralist, the former pursuing scientific objectivity through objective instruments and quantitative techniques, relying on the explicitness of detail to serve the truth rather than the training and experience of intuitionists. In this way the categorisation allows the significance of the contextual variables unique to each project to be combined with the pursuit of what is perceived to be an objective assessment of its value. Implicit within this are some of the potential tensions, contradictions, and choices which lie within any evaluation where the perceived desirability of objectivity is pursued within a subjective context.

Under this subjective/objective strand House incorporates two further sub-headings differentiating on the basis of the major audience for the evaluation, management/decision makers or the consumer. The first sub-heading is labelled managerial (elite) and within this he groups purposes which would commonly be served by evaluation in an organisational context, including what he describes as the scientifically objective models of evaluation such as systems analysis. This categorisation reflects the goal-focused, managerialist assumptions which underpin much of the literature that considers formal evaluation within organisations, managers tending to be both the instigators of formal evaluation and the primary audience/users of any findings. House's second sub-heading is consumer (mass) which represents the goal-free evaluation model and recognises a wider audience but is still focused on measuring effect and producing explicit knowledge.

Although House's scheme relates to the major evaluation models, all of which would fit the definition of formal evaluation given earlier, there is some recognition of informal evaluation. House groups models which look beyond measurement of effect under the intuitionist/pluralist categorisation. Within this he offers some recognition of the informal personal evaluation that takes place and the consequent existence of tacit knowledge among those who participate in the programme. This he describes as expertise through experience and transactional knowing which can be elicited through qualitative approaches and in this way can contribute to formal evaluations.

The significance of the manager/evaluator relationship is also considered by Guba and Lincoln (1989: 1994) in their categorisations, however, they also advocate the widening of participation within evaluation and their over-riding concern, in common with much of the later literature, is the use which will be made of evaluation findings. They have defined four generations of evaluations, the first three generations of which they perceive as tending towards managerialism; management requirements dominate the evaluation and the use or, of increasing concern, the non-use of the findings. To counter the dominance of managerialism they offer a 'fourth generation' of evaluation, which has echoes of both Scriven's goal-free approach and Stake's responsive approach (Shadish *et al.*, 1991) that advocates incorporation of a range of participant views (including the vested interests however, unlike goal-free evaluation).

Guba and Lincoln (1989) propose a responsive constructivist model in which evaluation seeks to achieve a consensus view through negotiations between all stakeholders facilitated by the evaluator. The authors describe a cyclical process where issues are identified, discussed with stakeholders, more information is then obtained on those issues which are not resolved and is given to the stakeholders to

inform any further negotiation, any remaining items of contention go forward to begin the cycle again. The implication is that all stakeholders will be committed to the process and will participate, therefore the findings will be more meaningful and will, as part of the process, be accepted and acted upon. In an ideal world this might well be the most effective way to evaluate programmes but it does appear to make some unrealistic assumptions. As Easterby-Smith (1994, p. 25) notes 'Managers and other informants are quite capable of refusing to co-operate with evaluation,' and it is unlikely in any situation that all stakeholder groups will have equal access to information, a common level of understanding or equal ability to undertake action. Nor is it likely that those who have the knowledge and the power will always be willing, or able, to share it to ensure such equality. In many situations, the outcome of such an iterative process is likely to be that of an unproductive, and frustrating, stalemate.

2.3. *Types of Evaluation*

An important element in determining the most appropriate type of evaluation is the identification of its intended purpose and the proposed use of any findings and a range of possibilities are identified within the literature. Scriven (1967) defined the methodological difference between the two major types of evaluation, formative and summative and these are generally accepted as the two principal functions of evaluation. Formative evaluation occurs during the life of the programme being evaluated and focuses on improvement of both the content and implementation of an ongoing activity, it is what Stufflebeam (1972) described as proactive evaluation informing the decision - making that occurs during implementation. Summative evaluation serves accountability, taking place once a programme is completed to assess the value and effectiveness of the change, in this sense it is what Stufflebeam described as reactive.

Patton (1990) connects quantitative, and experimental approaches to summative evaluations and qualitative and naturalistic approaches with formative evaluations although it is not clear on what basis these connections are made. However, this distinction does have earlier antecedents as reflected in House's (1983) scheme previously discussed. Summative evaluation is an overall assessment of the value and success of a programme in which it is likely that attention will be paid to 'hard' quantitative data such as costings, usage, and performance indicators and thus would be compatible with the predominantly quantitative models that appear under House's utilitarian category. The underlying implication is that summative evaluations are managerialist/decision-maker/externally oriented while formative evaluations tend, by their nature, to be internal and to involve greater participation. Torres *et al.* (1996) argue however that, in reality, a strict division between formative and summative has not been maintained. Most evaluations, they suggest, will combine formative and summative questions and attempts to maintain a dichotomy are unhelpful as summative findings are typically used in a formative sense.

Nevo (1986) identifies two further functions served by evaluation. The psychological or socio-political function identified in the literature (Cronbach *et al.*, 1980; House, 1974; Patton, 1978) where evaluation is being used for a communicative public relations purpose either to create an awareness or motivate desired behaviour rather than make judgements about a programme. Nevo based his definition of a fourth function on the work of Dornbusch and Scott (1975), the 'administrative function of evaluation' refers to the evaluation of an individual by their superior, and as Nevo notes it is a form of evaluation in common use in organisations.

Easterby-Smith (1994) defines four purposes which can be served by evaluation, although he cautions that it is unrealistic to expect any evaluation to serve more than one effectively;

- Proving which echoes the summative measurement of worth and impact described as second-generation evaluation by Guba and Lincoln (1989).
- Improving which equates to formative learning and is intended to identify what should happen next.
- Controlling, which shares elements of Nevo's fourth function albeit on an organisational rather than individual level, where the implementation of a programme is monitored for quality and efficiency.
- Learning in which the process of evaluation itself has a positive impact on the learning experience and of which he finds few examples in the literature.

Van der Knapp (1995) does identify circumstances in which evaluation directly contributes to learning. He believes that the process of policy evaluation serves to promote learning and advances an argumentative-subjectivist categorisation that encompasses the responsive evaluation approach of Guba and Lincoln. He describes it as the alternative to the 'traditional' rationalist-objectivist model of policy evaluation within which he includes previous evaluation models aimed at measuring, describing and judging. While acknowledging the role of evaluation in providing feedback knowledge he perceives an additional role of policy-oriented learning. Van der Knapp's approach is based on the belief that we each have our own reality.

The divergent values, norms assumptions and preferences particular actors entertain inevitably result in multiple images of reality. (Van der Knapp, 1995, p. 202)

In the argumentative-subjectivist approach the focus is on communication between the main policy actors, they exchange subjective arguments based on their own particular policy theories eventually achieving a shared body of knowledge with which participants can at least empathise. The role of the evaluating body is to be an active participant at the same level as the policy-maker, 'to provide high quality feedback and /or stimulating arguments' (p. 208) for when

Argumentation is based upon mutual attempts of informed persuasion, evaluation as an argumentative process offers a method for reciprocal learning through the exchange of arguments. Argument functions as a catalyst for policy-oriented learning. (p. 205).

Although Van der Knapp is advocating the use of this approach in a very specific situation where participants could be expected to enter the debate on a more equal footing it still relies very much on all parties being willing to co-operate to the same extent, possibly an unreal hope in the political world of policy formation.

Easterby-Smith (1994) argues that it is important to be clear about the purposes of any evaluation, not only because it is desirable to identify why an activity is taking place before it is done but also because confusion about the purposes is likely to lead to failure to address any of them adequately. Both Patton (1978) and Easterby-Smith (1994) recommend that an explicit choice of purpose is made on the basis that it is unrealistic to expect any evaluation to serve multiple purposes. Easterby-Smith (1994) suggests two primary ways of clarifying what that purpose should be; identification of a threat to the given activity, which he terms expediency, and which requires a focus on demonstrating the value of the activity, or identification of the purpose that the primary stakeholder/client wishes to pursue.

However it should not be assumed that identifying the intended purpose and use of any evaluation will be straightforward. In evaluations which seek to involve a wide range of participants the identification of the interests of various stakeholders may highlight widely differing purposes all of which may not be compatible and that will either require negotiation as suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1989) or that decisions are made about priorities and exclusions. Nor can it be assumed that the true purpose of an evaluation is one which is clearly and openly articulated for as Easterby-Smith (1994, p. 14) notes

It is likely that some concentration upon identifying the purpose of an evaluation may help flush out some of the hidden agendas of those involved.

Individuals and groups may be unable to articulate or be unwilling to share their true intentions, indeed it may be that they are unaware of them until they are faced with the evaluation report. Weiss (1990, p. 174) identifies the difficulties caused when stakeholders are unclear about their intentions, when they do not know what they need to know.

I've been in situations where we tried to get people in positions of authority to describe their informational needs. It is amazing how difficult it was for them to foresee what kind of information would make a difference. They are inclined to fall back on answers that seem socially acceptable in the organisation.

2.4. *Approaches to Evaluation*

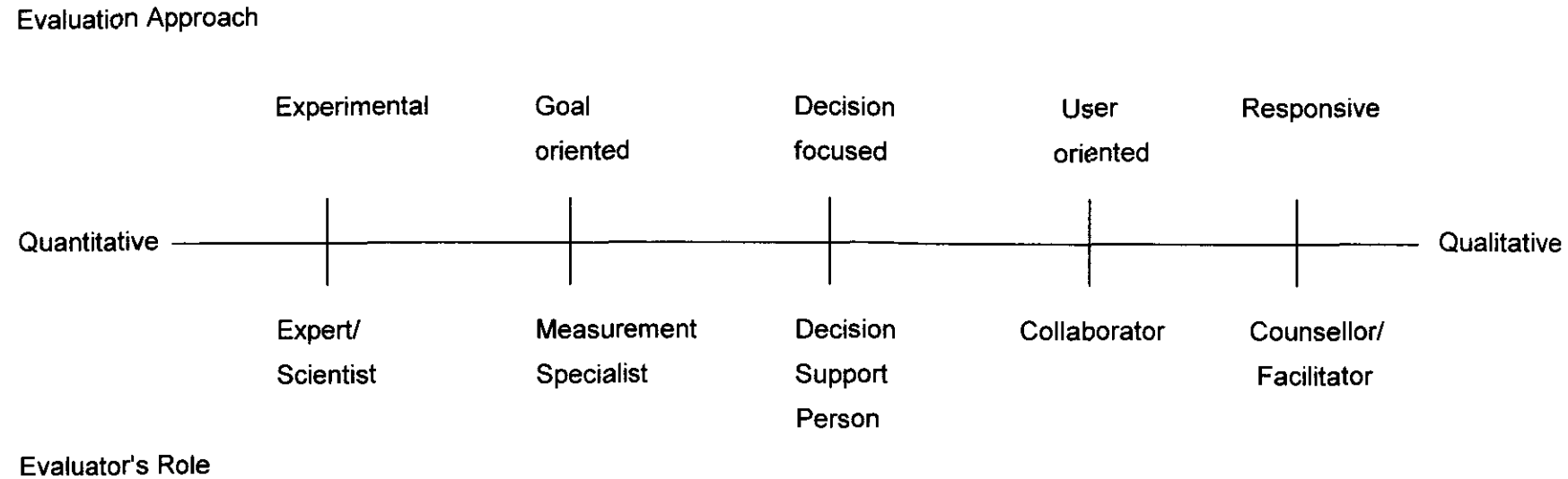
Each of the individual evaluation approaches reflects the beliefs of the creator of that approach not only in terms of the quantitative versus qualitative debate but also in the aims of the evaluation, notions of those who should be involved, the role of the evaluator and the perceived audience for the findings. It is important to note that the various approaches are not mutually exclusive and in practice each evaluator, depending on their personal beliefs and an assessment of the situation to be evaluated, may use a combination of methods.

The art of evaluation includes creating a design and gathering information that is appropriate for a specific situation and particular decision-making context ...Any given design is necessarily an interplay of resources, possibilities, creativity, and personal judgements by the people involved. (Patton, 1990, p. 13).

Stetcher and Davis (1987) writing for those wishing to undertake evaluation seek to reduce the potentially overwhelming breadth of choice generated by the debates already described. By identifying five general categories of what they call 'evaluation approaches' they offer a more simplistic approach than many but one which achieves some clarity in identifying the range of possibilities. Taken a step further I believe this categorisation also lends itself to being mapped on to a quantitative/qualitative continuum reflecting the methods most likely to be used in

each type of evaluation thus providing us with a visual summary of the broad choices to be made (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2. 2 The Range Of Evaluation Approaches



Experimental evaluation is a primarily quantitative orientation which seeks to apply 'hard' scientific principles to social programme evaluation in contrast to the responsive evaluation which seeks an understanding of the issues based on the opinion of all those involved who have a stake in the programme, is likely to be highly subjective and may present conflicting perspectives without any attempt to resolve them. The complexity of these issues and the degree of sensitivity required in making these decisions can result in many of the difficulties identified in the literature that arise in the conduct of an evaluation and impact on likelihood of the findings being accepted and utilised.

Legge (1984) describes a crisis of verification which occurs when the needs of the chosen research methodology conflicts with the needs of managers, this she suggests may be a particular problem for academic researchers when academic requirements may not permit a pragmatic approach to methodology. In real life experimental research designs may be impracticable and the results have little meaning for the manager. The use of qualitative methods can also be problematic as *'Both scientists and non-scientists often hold strong views about what constitutes credible evidence,'* (Patton, 1990, p. 477, italics in original) and managers may not be comfortable with qualitative evidence. Managers are often working within a very quantitatively oriented environment where numbers convey accuracy and a sense of precision and may have little experience or training in qualitative methods (Skinner *et al.*, 2000). Common concerns about qualitative methods, which are not restricted to evaluations, include the subjectivity of the evaluator, the small sample size normally involved, the difficulties of generalisation and the degree of intellectual rigour involved. All of these have been extensively addressed and countered by various authors (see for example Guba and Lincoln, 1989; House, 1983; Miles and Hubermann, 1994; Morse, 1994; Patton, 1990) but remain real sources of concern within many organisations.

2.5. *The Role of Evaluator*

Much of the literature within the education and social programmes sector is written from the perspective of the evaluator, either in terms of reporting an evaluator's experience or with the intention of guiding an evaluator's actions towards successful conclusion of projects. A strong theme within the literature is the significance of the role of evaluator in any evaluation, in particular the relationship between the evaluator, those funding the evaluation and/or the project under consideration, those participating and whoever forms the evaluator's audience, all of which is crucial to the success of the evaluation.

Within the literature there are two major distinctions made between evaluators, internal versus external and amateur versus professional. Torres *et al.* (1996) define internal evaluators as those employed by the same organisation whose programmes they evaluate, while external evaluators are those employed by outside organisations. These are helpful but suggest a clarity of distinction which may not be present in reality. For example, these definitions do not clearly reflect the position of consultants recruited by the organisation to undertake evaluation; technically they are employed by the organisation (internal) but yet are not part of it, having loyalties and commitments elsewhere (external). Torres *et al.*, (1996) provide a useful summary of the drawbacks and benefits identified in the literature for both internal and external evaluators (reflected in Table 2.1) and suggest that

Table 2. 1 Drawbacks and Benefits of Internal v. External/Amateur v. Professional Evaluators

Status	Internal		External	
	Strengths	Weaknesses	Strengths	Weaknesses
Amateur	<p>Knowledge of the organisation, its culture, values and politics</p> <p>Has an understanding of the internal processes</p> <p>May find it easier to build a rapport with the project team and those involved in the evaluation</p> <p>May be easier for learning from the evaluation to be absorbed by the organisation even if only informally</p> <p>No additional salary cost</p>	<p>Likely to have fewer technical skills in relation to evaluation</p> <p>May find it more difficult not to be influenced by dominant stakeholders</p> <p>May find it hard to establish credibility in this role</p> <p>May be more likely to be drawn into internal disputes</p> <p>May find it difficult to involve stakeholders because they see evaluation as the evaluator's job</p> <p>May not be part of critical information/decision making networks</p>	<p>May find it easier to remain objective than an internal evaluator</p> <p>Less likely to have pre-conceived ideas about the project</p> <p>May have more credibility as an 'independent' assessor</p> <p>Are not subordinate to anyone in the organisation and are not reliant on it for their long term career</p>	<p>Likely to have fewer technical skills in relation to evaluation</p> <p>Little knowledge of the organisation or the project therefore will have to spend more time researching background knowledge than an internal candidate</p> <p>Will not have an understanding of the internal politics, values and culture of the organisation therefore may miss findings which would be significant in that context</p> <p>May be influenced by the need to attract repeat business</p> <p>Additional cost</p>
Professional	<p>Well developed technical skills</p> <p>Already has credibility within the organisation by virtue of her/his position</p> <p>Has knowledge of the organisation, its culture, values and politics</p> <p>Has an understanding of the internal processes</p> <p>May find it easier to build a rapport with the project team and those involved in the evaluation</p> <p>No additional salary cost</p>	<p>May find it difficult not to be influenced by dominant stakeholders</p> <p>Is more likely to be drawn into internal disputes</p> <p>May be less credible to stakeholders and those external to the organisation</p> <p>May have other responsibilities</p> <p>Is so familiar with the organisational culture and values results may be unintentionally biased</p>	<p>Well developed technical skills</p> <p>Likely to have had experience of evaluation in other organisations</p> <p>May find it easier to remain objective than an internal evaluator</p> <p>May have greater external credibility as an 'independent' voice</p>	<p>Little knowledge of the organisation or the project therefore will have to spend more time researching background knowledge than an internal candidate</p> <p>Will not have an understanding of the internal politics, values and culture of the organisation therefore may miss findings which would be significant in that context</p> <p>May be influenced by the need to attract repeat business</p> <p>Additional cost</p>

Source: Nevo (1986) and Torres *et al.* (1996).

there are significant benefits to be gained by combining the two positions in the role of an external evaluator able to establish a long-term relationship with the organisation.

A further distinction identified by Nevo (1986) based on Scriven's work, is that between amateur and professional evaluators. An amateur is described as primary professional training is not in evaluation and who is not solely employed as an evaluator whereas a professional evaluator is one who has received extensive evaluation training and whose main responsibility is that of conducting evaluation. Combining the characteristics of the four types, (internal/external, amateur/professional) as identified by Torres *et al.* (1996) and Nevo (1986) highlights the benefits and drawbacks of each of possibility. More importantly in the context of this research it identifies factors which are likely to be significant when choices of evaluator are being made and within which lie potential barriers to successful evaluation. These are also summarised in Table 2.1.

Legge (1984) notes the inherent tensions present for the evaluator in any evaluation situation in terms of the legitimacy that they give to the process being evaluated (the crisis of accreditation) and the difficulty of maintaining independence. The crisis of accreditation concerns the legitimacy that the presence of the evaluator gives to the process being evaluated. This happens in spite of the fact that the process may be influenced and limited by those who are responsible for the change because they are commonly the people who instigated the evaluation. Although the 'open' purpose of the evaluation may be that of assessing the value and effects of a change with which the evaluator is happy to be associated there may be hidden agendas, of which the evaluator may not be aware, such as raising support or opposition to a change, apportioning blame, evading responsibility or simply paying lip service to external requirements. This same dominant stakeholder group is also

likely to control dissemination and use of the findings; a key issue if we accept

Colebatch's (1995, p. 159) view that

Evaluation is an organizational process not simply because it is something in which organizational participants are engaged but because by its very nature it is framing how organizational activity is understood.

The evaluator acting independently of both project and organisation might be expected to suffer less from the difficulties described above, as both the project and the organisation are less likely to be in a position to exert direct pressure. Indeed, Simons (1984) argues that in contexts where evaluation involves assessing policy and executive levels of management independent evaluators are *necessary* to cope with the pressures that can be exerted by those being evaluated. House (1977) suggests, however, that people do not want a neutral evaluator because it equates to someone who is unconcerned about the issues. There are other less laudable explanations of why evaluator independence is not always prized. There may be pressure from a dominant stakeholder group (often management) that perceives it as important that the 'correct' results are produced and the evaluator may acquiesce for a number of reasons. The independence of those who conduct evaluations as a profession may be influenced by their desire to receive further commissions from the same organisation while those internal to the organisation, but not the project, may be subject to pressures from sources within the wider organisation which may or may not be supportive of the project's aims. Those employed by both the organisation and the project may have greatest difficulty remaining unbiased or in reconciling conflicting pressures as the fate of their own career as well as the outcome of the initiative and the evaluation rests on their choices.

Simons (1984) further develops the theme of independence and the difficulty of its negotiation whether the evaluator is internal or external. Highlighting similar issues to Legge she defines independence as being the freedom in the conduct of the evaluation to *report events and different value perspectives fairly, accurately and*

impartially, plus the freedom to make the findings accessible to all the groups with a legitimate interest. Simons perceives the absence of independence as a growing problem largely for the same reasons identified by Legge, and highlights the importance of clear agreements at the outset, possibly in a contractual form.

Although the majority of the literature argues the necessity and desirability of evaluator independence, there are those who suggest that there may also be disadvantages, particularly if a desired outcome is learning as defined by Easterby-Smith (1994). Based on his experience of curriculum research Stenhouse (1984, p. 78) advocates internal evaluators rather than 'independent' researchers because he perceives the developer/evaluator dichotomy as having 'disastrous implications for and effects upon the practice of education' and he argues that independent evaluation merely perpetuates the illusion of some 'independent and disengaged view of the truth' (p. 85).

2.6. Use of Findings

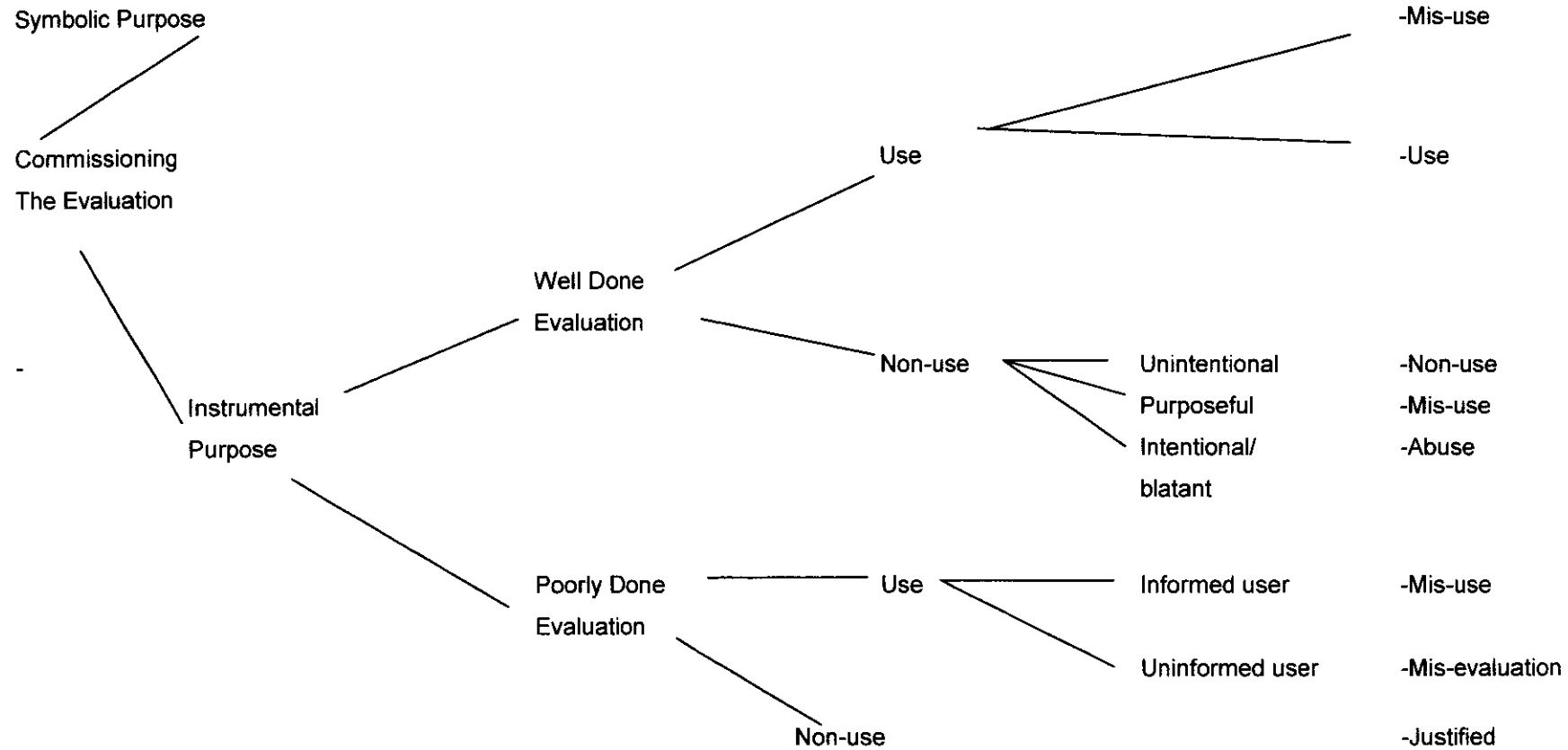
A recurrent theme within the evaluation literature is the increase in non-utilisation of findings (Weiss, 1990), something which is widely bemoaned by authors (for example, Alkin, 1990; Legge, 1984; Weiss, 1990) and which gives serious cause for concern if, as Patrickson *et al.* (1995) suggest

Evaluation is important not as a final stage but as a precursor to more change in a cycle of continuous improvement.

Alkin (1990) draws out a number of themes in his Evaluation Mis-use Category System and clearly identifies reasons for not only the use and non-use of evaluation findings but develops the original debate by adding the category of mis-use. In effect use and non-use lie at opposite ends of a continuum with mis-use in the centre (House, 1993). Mis-use can occur relatively innocently in the sense of omission, when the technical aspects of the evaluation have not been properly

conducted, when the evaluator fails to understand the context of the evaluation properly or when the evaluator fails to communicate appropriately with the users. These types of mis-use represent errors of omission on the part of the evaluator and Alkin groups them all under 'mis-evaluation'. A more blatant form of misuse occurs however when the evaluator is swayed by the sponsor to alter findings or to report selectively, when the sponsor actively chooses not to use the findings or to use them in a way which was not intended (see Figure 2.3)

Figure 2.3 Evaluation Mis-use Category System.



Source: Alkin (1990, p. 293)

Evaluation findings, which contradict the beliefs, suspicions, or knowledge that decision-makers already have or are predisposed to accept, can result in what Legge (1984) terms a crisis of utilisation, a problem also identified by Patton (1978). Such findings may be seen as exposing the failures of the management thereby threatening individual or group positions and as such are unlikely to be widely circulated or acted upon. Most evaluators desire that the value and legitimacy of their reports should be recognised through acceptance and use. This desire in itself may result in the evaluator's independence being compromised if the only way to achieve use is to respond to the needs of decision-makers, the group with the power to implement the results.

2.7. *The Barriers Identified by the Evaluation Literature*

Consideration of the explanations given for non-use begins to identify issues and tensions which make any evaluation a complex process and which can create significant obstacles. Obstacles which may determine, not only whether any findings produced will be useful, but also whether an effective evaluation will take place at all. Literature in the fields of health, education and social policy reflect the complexity of choice that is an inevitable result of the history and development of evaluation. The result of active academic and practioner debate is the existence of a complex range of possibilities inherent in any formal evaluation, possibilities that may change over the course of an evaluation/programme. There are choices to be made about purpose, process and participation and within the discussions found in the literature about the available options we can begin to identify some of the factors which can create barriers to evaluation (Table 2.2).

Table 2. 2 Summary of Potential Barriers Identified in the Evaluation Literature

Aspects of Evaluation	Barrier	Possible Effect
Purpose	Absence of clear purpose	Confusion and lack of direction Conflict between competing purposes Evaluator's goals dominate Ineffective or inappropriate evaluation Mis-use or non-use of findings – crisis of utilisation
	Dominant stakeholder group (normally management)	Evaluator independence compromised leading to crisis of accreditation and/or biased findings Exclusion of other stakeholders interests/goals
	Hidden agendas	Conflict
		Non-use or mis-use of findings
Approach	Crisis of verification - disagreements about methodology	Scope and/or validity of evaluation compromised Non-use of findings
Role of Evaluator	Dominant stakeholder group (usually management)	Participation limited
	Relationship to the organisation (internal/external)	Lack of contextual sensitivity Independence compromised
	Lack of evaluation expertise	Ineffective or inappropriate evaluation Non-use or mis-use of findings
	Crisis of accreditation	Confers legitimacy on an inappropriate or biased evaluation process

The literature identifies a variety of purposes which can be served by evaluation but cautions that there are limits to the number which can be successfully served at once (Easterby-Smith, 1994) and that, while some purposes will be explicit, there may be others which are hidden and need to be surfaced if they are not to have a detrimental impact on the evaluation process. This draws attention to the importance, and complexity, of the various stakeholder groups and the balances of power that exist within the situation in determining funding, participation and ultimate use of the findings. Managerial dominance, both in terms of determining the nature of the evaluation and the use of the findings, significantly affects the reality of evaluation. Findings which challenge the expectations or intentions of those who hold power in the organisation are unlikely to be utilised and there is a real possibility that influence will be exerted to ensure that this conflict does not occur. Lack of clarity about the purpose of an evaluation or the information needs of the intended audience (frequently the organisation's decision-makers) creates confusion. Where the internal focus is on the needs of the decision-makers limited consideration may be given to the needs of others involved, particularly where the power balance is unequal.

A significant aspect of the increasing scope and complexity of evaluation has been the development of a range of possibilities for the way the actual process takes place, not only in terms of the nature of the data to be collected and how it should be analysed, but also who should undertake the key role of evaluator. Crucial within this, and central to much of the academic debate, is the nature of the evaluator's role and his/her relationship with those involved in both the programme being assessed and the evaluation process itself. The choice of evaluator is likely to be influenced by cost, time scale and availability but may also be significantly influenced by a number of other issues such as the personal agenda of those

responsible for the decision, the outcomes desired and the uses envisaged for the evaluation findings.

From both the organisation's and the evaluator's perspective the reality of the role undertaken by the evaluator is the key to a successful evaluation. The possibilities may range from sole responsibility for determining the nature of the evaluation and what is to be assessed (goal-free) to an evaluator constrained by those who commission, and fund, the evaluation to produce particular findings. Whichever applies decisions are required about issues which may be contentious; decisions about methodology may lead to conflict between the needs of the evaluator and the preferences of those commissioning the evaluation; decisions about participation may be affected by hidden agendas, inter-group relationships and unequal distributions of power. The very existence of the evaluator gives credibility to the evaluation yet their ability to be eclectic will depend on the extent to which they are, and can maintain true independence.

2.8. HRM, Change and Evaluation

This section considers evaluation in the context of HRM and change. In sharp contrast to the richness of the ongoing argument and debate about evaluation evident in other disciplines the complex discussions of change by management academics accords very limited consideration to evaluation despite recognising its significant role in a successful change process.

2.8.1 Evaluation and HRM

Increasingly it has been argued that HRM practices have a key role to play in the implementation of business strategy (Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni, 1994) and successful change processes. In 1987 Guest identified a key role for HRM within a global scenario of organisations faced with increasing external and internal

pressures when he asserted that 'an important feature of successful HRM is the capacity to implement strategic plans' which in turn requires

A capacity to manage planned organisational change and to be adaptive and responsive in the face of unanticipated pressures at all levels in the organisation. (Guest, 1987, p. 514).

Pettigrew and Whipp (1991), in their study of strategic organisational change, found that the difference between higher and lesser performing organisations was, among other things, the willingness to invest in raising the consciousness of HRM.

Successful organisations paid as much attention to the *process* of human resource change and its degrees of progressive acceptance outside the HRM department, as they did to the substance of its policies and procedures themselves. (Mabey and Salaman, 1994, p.75, emphasis in the original).

Pettigrew and Whipp (1991) went on to cite HRM, as it relates to the total set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that firms need to compete, as being one of the five key factors for change.

However, as Delaney and Hueslid (1996), observe, despite the increasing encouragement given to organisations to implement a range of human resource practices which, it is argued, will improve their competitiveness in the global market place, *measurement of that contribution has proved much more difficult*. The problem of measuring the effectiveness of HRM is one that is widely discussed within the literature but little is offered in the way of firm conclusions or substantive solutions. 'The mechanisms by which human resource decisions create and sustain value are complicated and not well understood.' (Becker and Gerhart, 1996, p. 780). Major difficulties exist both in terms of defining what effectiveness is and how it should be measured in the context of HRM.

A number of studies have reported positive links between HRM practices and performance, Huselid (1995), for example, put forward empirical evidence to support the link between what he described as High Performance Work Practices (comprehensive employee recruitment procedures, performance management

systems, incentive compensation and extensive employee involvement and training) and better firm performance. Likewise, in a study of US steel mini-mills Arthur (1994) found that those mills with a 'commitment' style of HR strategy, as against a control style, were more successful. Purcell (1996) describes 'bundles' of HRM practices (a *collection* of integrated practises whose combined strength is greater than the individual parts) that other authors have identified and which, they claim, will have a significant effect on a firm's performance. Further evidence to support a positive relationship between progressive HRM practises and organisational performance is offered in the Delaney and Huselid (1996) study. However, Purcell (1996) casts doubt on the evidence that supports this argument and Delaney and Huselid (1996) admit that the causal connections were unproven. Becker and Gerhart's (1996) critical consideration of work attempting to establish the link between HR practices and organisational performance found that researchers have tended to be too simplistic and that the 'typical approach needs to be revisited,' (p. 778). They suggest that it appears that researchers still 'have much to learn about what constitutes a high performance HRM strategy' (p. 784) and how it might be evaluated.

2.8.2 Evaluation and Change Management

Pettigrew (1987) described management of change as the central practical and theoretical issue of the 1980's. There is little to suggest that its importance decreased in the 1990's or that it will in the first decade of the new millennium where, as Carnall (1995, p. 1) says 'in a changing world the only constant is change' and the organisational climate is one of almost constant change (Daly, 1994). Within the literature it is argued that, in the current business environment, organisations seeking to maintain a competitive edge must recognise that adapting to meet future change becomes a key factor in success (Carnall, 1995). Yet, 'the

management of change is now commonly viewed as a complex and difficult area.'

(Buchanan and Boddy, 1992, p. 1).

Much has been written about the necessary ingredients of successful change management and numerous prescriptions are proposed. The vast majority of these do include an assessment of results or outcomes at some point (for examples, see Buchanan and Boddy, 1992; Carnall, 1995; Kirkpatrick, 1985) and there is some articulation of the importance of such measurement. As early as 1976 Silverzweig and Allan state

We have found that it is absolutely necessary to state specific measurable objectives that everyone agrees will, upon accomplishment, constitute satisfactory achievement. (p. 38)

Carnall (1995) also identifies monitoring as an important component of the management skills required for change. Patrickson *et al.* (1995, p. 6) argue that evaluation is a necessary precursor to more change 'in a cycle of continuous improvement', a pivotal point which provides an opportunity for analysis and reflection before making adjustments to the course of change. Yet although change tends to be seen as a continuous ongoing and iterative process (Alpander and Lee, 1995) it is noticeable that many of the change management models imply a series of linear sequential steps of which evaluation is often the last item considered.

However, despite the importance of the evaluation of change being acknowledged for more than two decades it is clear that evaluation is still rarely carried out (Patrickson *et al.*, 1995). Mabey and Salaman (1995, p. 2) observe that there is a

Noticeable and striking pattern apparent in the history of approaches to organisation change and improvement; first there is a high enthusiasm, extravagant promises, followed by failure, deep disillusionment and rejection. And then silence as if it had never happened. Until the next time.

It appears that Patrickson *et al.* (1995, p.14) understate the problem when they observe that 'many organisations do not devote the same level of energy to change

evaluation as they do to program design and progress' and it seems clear that the depth of understanding and expertise in evaluation developed in other disciplines has made little impact in the world of management. Davis and Salasin (1975) observed that, although evaluation and planned organisational change would seem inextricably linked, few people are knowledgeable in both areas . Even in the fields of training and development, the section of management and business literature where the majority of references to evaluation are to be found, Bramley (1991) notes that most evaluation is done at the 'reaction' level and that the majority of organisations do not attempt to evaluate the benefits to the organisation.

Tichy (1983) lists the forces which act against evaluation under three headings. The first he classes as technical and these reinforce Seashore *et al.*'s (1983) point about the difficulties of knowing what to measure and how to relate this to organisational strategy and performance. Tichy's second category relates to management culture wherein managers are addicted to grand strategy rather than systematic, incremental measurement. Patrickson *et al.* (1995) also identify factors which support these two categories. They maintain that evaluations are rarely undertaken in sufficient detail partly because they are backward looking but more importantly because the environment is constantly changing, often to the extent that by the time of the review it is difficult to isolate and assess variables accurately. Nevertheless they argue using broad indicators to identify the extent to which the objectives have been achieved can still usefully inform future change. Lewis and Thornhill (1994) also identify these issues and draw attention to the difficulty of designing evaluations and obtaining data. Owen (1993b) the inadequacy of information available for monitoring as one of the primary reasons why strategies do not materialise.

Tichy's third category is political and focuses on the stakeholders who have been sold a solution in which they have invested too much both on an organisational and, more importantly, a personal level for it to be perceived as a failure. Argyris (1986) identifies self-reinforcing, second order errors in the management of strategic change which include managers not acting on information or covering up problems which compounds the error. Argyris also argues that successful management of strategic change can be inhibited by an organisation's defensive routines. Although intended to prevent experience of embarrassment or threat such routines can make it difficult for managers to act on what they know or to know what they do not know in order to act to acquire the knowledge that they lack.

2.9 The Contribution of Evaluation

Within the literature a number of authors identify important contributions that evaluation can make to the successful management of change, including the role of effective evaluation in improving management decision making by providing information and understanding (Love, 1991). The theme of the collection of *information and its use is a significant one*. Kirkpatrick (1985) argues the importance of feedback in gaining acceptance and commitment to change initiatives while Carnall (1995) suggests that people need information to understand new systems and their place in them. However, in considering the gathering and sharing of information in the context of organisational change processes we also need to recognise the significance of power and its relationship to the acquisition and use of knowledge. Managers are not passive by-standers when it comes to the importation of new ideas; rather they have their own agendas, and select, reinterpret and give relative emphasis to ideas according to that agenda. Easterby-Smith (1994, p. 4) *observes that evaluation in particular is a complex process which cannot easily be divorced from issues of power, politics, value judgements and human interests.*

Pettigrew *et al.* (1992) identify the significance of influencing the conditions that determine how situations are interpreted in order to enable the organisation and its members to be able to deal with new situations and create lasting change. In doing this they also highlight not only issues of power and influence but also the importance of the informal evaluation that continually occurs

At the informal level individual members of any institution will be actively engaged in making their own personal evaluations of activities that come within their own areas of responsibility. The problem will be that, as with all other spheres of life, individuals' perceptions will be coloured and distorted by particular lenses through which they see the world. We can only make an evaluation on the basis of information to which we have access. The conclusions we reach will be limited by the quality of that information – its comprehensiveness, relevance, up to dateness, accuracy. (Calder, 1994, p. 16)

Mabey and Salaman (1995) also highlight the imprecise nature of the assessment of outcomes of a change process on the basis that it depends on who is asked, the extent to which they have been consulted and involved, their stake in the process and the extent to which they perceive their interests to have benefited or suffered. They argue the importance of individual interpretation and retrospective sense-making in determining an individual's predisposition to future change and suggest that while the outcomes of a change process may be influenceable they cannot be controlled by a single individual or group.

Coopey (1995) maintains that, wherever they are, individuals will attempt to articulate their knowledge and explanations for the activities in which they are engaged in order to persuade others to accept their rationalisations. Hendry (1996) argues that this also occurs on a group basis and that the importance of these 'communities-of-practice' which exist within an organisation need to be taken into account during any change process. Nonaka *et al.* (1996) refer to externalisation (the process of articulating tacit knowledge into explicit concepts) as the quintessential knowledge creation process that is triggered by dialogue or collective reflection and Hendry (1996) uses the term communities-of-practice to describe the relationships within which this occurs. Communities-of-practice develop to solve

problems and within them people share tacit knowledge through discussion, exchange ideas about work processes, innovate problem-solving routines and experiment with new approaches and ideas. Through this experiential learning process, cognitive structures are defined and culture formed as practice and ideas are spread. Thus, Hendry (1996) suggests that any change process must fundamentally be about learning and as such, learning theory needs to have a central place within the theory of planned organisational change. Although he focuses on the beginning of the change process, an underpinning argument for his stance is nevertheless the importance of feedback and its effect in either changing or reinforcing peoples' perceptions and behaviour.

Increasingly the ability of an organisation and the individuals within it to share knowledge and learning has been promoted as another key means of maintaining competitive advantage (for example, Pedler *et al.*, 1991; Senge, 1990). It is argued that a culture that supports and promotes continuous learning enables the organisation to anticipate and react to the increasingly uncertain, turbulent environment in which it operates. Key concepts, articulated by Argyris (1976) and Argyris and Schon (1978), such as single and double loop learning, underpin much of the writing about organisational learning. There is a noticeable tendency to focus on cyclical processes, not dissimilar to Kolb's (1984) learning cycle, and to include a stage for reflection which informs future action. Pedler *et al.* (1991), for example, include the conscious structuring of evaluation as part of the learning process as a characteristic of learning organisations, while Dixon (1994) argues that for organisational learning to take place every person in the organisation must engage in all the steps of the learning cycle, not only on an individual but also on a collective basis.

2.10 The Barriers to Evaluation Identified in the HRM and Change Literature

Within the HRM and organisational change literature the significant contribution of evaluation in terms of continual improvement is recognised; increasing individual and collective knowledge, improving decision-making and ultimately offering competitive advantage. Yet while apparently accepting, and indeed arguing, that evaluation should be part of any change process, there is a paucity of guidance on how it might be done. Little of the complex debate about competing paradigms, methodologies and choices apparent in the health, education and social policy literature is reflected in the management literature. However, evaluation clearly poses a problematic aspect of both HRM and change processes within organisations, to the extent that it is a relatively rare event.

A number of the obstacles which are identified relate to the lack of guidance and understanding, these include the difficulties of knowing what to measure, how to measure it, and, having done so, how to relate the results to organisational performance or business strategy. These issues are further complicated, it is suggested, by the lengthy timescales involved in a change process and the management culture present in organisations.

The perspective of the managers concerned is identified by a number of authors as critical to whether an evaluation takes place and the form it takes. A management culture focused on grand strategy is unlikely to be inclined towards systematic and detailed measurement while those who have a stake in the success of an initiative will not risk evidence of failure. Even where the intent is to assess initiatives the effect of organisational defence mechanisms may be to make it difficult for managers to identify the information they need or to act upon any information that

they do receive. The barriers identified in the HRM and Change literature are summarised in Table 2.3.

Table 2. 3 Potential Barriers Identified Within the HR and Change Literature

Barrier	Possible Effects
<p>Culture</p> <p>-Addiction of managers to grand strategy</p> <p>-Evaluation perceived as backward looking</p> <p>-Linear approach to change</p>	<p>Fail to include plans and resources for evaluation in implementation strategy</p> <p>Lack of incentive to expend time and resources on something which is in past</p> <p>Evaluation the last activity to be considered – little time or resource expended</p>
<p>Nature of change process (complex and lengthy)</p>	<p>Lack of incentive to expend time and resources on something which is in past</p> <p>Difficult to disentangle variables</p>
<p>Absence of guidance and experience (Technical)</p>	<p>Lack of knowledge about methods</p> <p>Difficulties of measuring the impact of HR initiatives (difficulty of isolating impact)</p> <p>Evaluation occurs at reaction level</p>
<p>Dominant interests (usually managerial)</p>	<p>Resistance to negative or unanticipated findings which challenge assumptions or are perceived as likely to harm the position of those responsible for the initiative</p> <p>Power exerted to influence findings</p> <p>Findings given limited circulation or filtered by dominant group, knowledge and understanding restricted</p>

2.11 Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter has been to consider evaluation firstly as a concept in order to define the field of study and then as a process in order to scope the issues which may determine whether an evaluation takes place, and if it does, the difficulties which may be encountered. It is clear that the depth and complexity of understanding developed in the fields of education, health and social policy is not reflected in the level of debate occurring in the management literature.

Consequently, it was necessary to explore both bodies of literature in order to identify the features of an evaluation process wherein the barriers to evaluation may arise and which form the starting point for this research project. The review of the literature has confirmed that the phenomenon is important but that in the context of change management and HRM the processes involved have been the subject of very limited exploration and are not well understood.

2.11.1 Summary of Literature Review

The main points, which can be drawn from a combined consideration of the review of the two areas of literature are:

- 1. An evaluation project, and the choices made as part of that project, does not take place in isolation:** An evaluation takes place within the context of an organisation, any decisions which are made or activities which are undertaken will be influenced by the existing structures, culture and norms.

Possible barriers which result:

-Addiction of managers to grand strategy: No interest at senior management level beyond the creation of strategy, therefore plans and resources for evaluation are not considered.

-Evaluation perceived as backward looking: Absence of any incentive to expend time and resources on something which is in the past, especially if those involved in the implementation are moved on to other projects/tasks.

-Linear approach to change: Evaluation the last activity to be considered - little time or resource expended.

-Absence of data: An additional consequence of each of these may be the absence of any system to collect relevant data for monitoring purposes.

- 2. The purpose of the evaluation needs to be established:** Over and above the original goals of the initiative decisions need to be made about the primary purpose of the evaluation process, decisions which will impact on *the approaches used, the extent of participation and ultimately the utilisation of findings.*

Possible barriers which result:

-Absence of clear purpose: This has a number of potential effects, it may, for example, cause confusion and lack of direction, there may be conflict between competing purposes or the evaluator's goals may dominate, each of which could result in an ineffective or inappropriate evaluation and the mis-use or non-use of findings.

-Dominant stakeholder group (normally management): The needs of the dominant stakeholder group may lead to the independence of the evaluator being compromised resulting in a *crisis of accreditation* (Legge, 1984) and/or biased findings. The interests/goals of other stakeholders may be excluded.

-Hidden agendas: May lead to conflict and/or the non-use or mis-use of findings.

- 3. There is a wide range of choice in the approaches available to be used within any given evaluation:** Although the approaches are extensively considered and discussed in the fields of education, health and social policy this does not occur in the management literature and awareness of the possibilities may be much more limited within organisations. Choice may also be constrained or influenced by the preferences of a dominant stakeholder group or lack of expertise on the part of the evaluator.

Possible barriers which result:

-Crisis of verification: Disagreements about methodology which may be due to the inappropriateness of an academic approach to research, the influence of a dominant stakeholder group (usually management) and/or the absence of guidance and/or experience/expertise. A crisis of verification may result in ineffective or partial measures being used, can lead to the scope and/or validity of the evaluation being compromised and the findings not being used, it may also lead to the exclusion of some groups from the evaluation process and/or the sharing of the outcomes.

- 4. The choice of the evaluator and the role that (s)he is able to take is significant in determining the nature of the evaluation process which takes place and the findings which are produced:** By their very existence it is suggested that evaluators give credibility to the process yet the potential

for variation in terms of the responsibility, scope and independence afforded to any evaluator is enormous; affected by factors such as their relationship to the organisation and to the project, specific stakeholder groups and their own preferences and expertise.

Possible barriers which result:

-Relationship to the organisation (internal/external): An external evaluator may have a lack of contextual sensitivity due to unfamiliarity with the politics and culture of the organisation while an internal evaluator may find her/his independence compromised because (s)he is employed by the organisation.

-Lack of evaluation expertise: May lead to an ineffective or inappropriate evaluation, which in turn results in non-use or mis-use of findings.

-Crisis of accreditation (Legge, 1984): The presence of an evaluator confers legitimacy on an inappropriate or biased evaluation process.

- 5. Acceptance and intended use of findings:** The non-use and mis-use of findings produced by evaluations is an increasing problem which inevitably must have negative effects not only on perceptions of the position of evaluators but also on the value of the evaluation process itself. Although in some cases this is attributable to poor evaluation practice it is more often a reflection of other factors within the organisation.

Possible barriers which result:

-Findings which challenge the assumptions /interests of dominant stakeholders (usually management): Pressure may be placed on the evaluator to report findings in an acceptable form, possibly by omitting certain findings.

-Lack of evaluation expertise: May result in an ineffective or inappropriate evaluation after which the findings are suppressed or only given a limited circulation.

-Crisis of accreditation: Confers legitimacy on an inappropriate or biased evaluation process which may result in the non-use or mis-use of findings.

- 6. Informal evaluation takes place continuously and at every level of the organisation:** This does not appear as a significant factor in most of the discussions found in the literature. The focus tends to be on formal evaluation processes although there is some recognition in the management literature that everyone involved in an initiative, in whatever capacity, will assess its impact and degree of success using their own experience and frame of reference. This assessment may or may not be shared with peers and managers and may be crucial in the acceptance and rationalisation of change. While the literature does not associate any specific barriers with informal evaluation, a significant area which is not addressed concerns the impact of informal evaluations when the conclusions differ from any formal assessment made.

Chapter 3 Methodology and Research Design

3.1. Introduction

The development of any research project requires choices to be made about the strategy and design best suited to studying the topic of interest within the context of a stated purpose. 'The crucial issue for the researcher is how to discover, describe, explain and intervene in the phenomenon under investigation,' (Blaikie, 1993, p. 131). Such choices need to take account of the nature of the subject, the context and the questions which need to be addressed. However, they are also influenced by the beliefs of the individual researcher, the relevant research community and the discipline, management in this instance, within which the research takes place.

In adopting an approach to social enquiry the researcher is buying into a set of choices with far reaching implications ... No one approach or strategy and its accompanying choices on these issues provides a perfect solution for the researcher; there is no ideal way to gain knowledge of the social world ... all involve assumptions, judgements and compromises (Blaikie, 1993, p.215).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) suggest that the first steps in any case study research should include identifying the lenses through which the study will be designed and the phenomenon interpreted. The researcher needs to understand his or her own perspectives. Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1991) identify three criteria on which choice of research design should be made:

- i) The aims or context of the research to be undertaken.
- ii) The personal preference of the researcher.
- iii) Issues of validity and reliability.

The purpose of this chapter is to consider each of these choices and to explain why, in the context of the study and this particular researcher; the methodological approach and consequent research design were appropriate and met the three criteria above.

The chapter begins with a consideration of the ontological and epistemological issues which informed the methodological choice made. Next, the research design developed

on the basis of the chosen approach is outlined which leads in turn to an explanation of the data coding and analysis procedures used.

3.2. Methodology

3.2.1. Ontology

In the field of social science, the most fundamental choice to be made by the researcher stems from beliefs in the nature of reality and how it might be understood. This has been variously represented as a choice between postivism and phenemonology (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1991; Remenyi *et al.*, 1998), realism and constructivism (Blaikie, 1993), realism and nominalism (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), positivism and constructivism (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). While the labels may differ, the dichotomy in belief represented by each pairing is essentially the same, belief in the existence of a single, comprehensible, objective reality versus belief in reality as a social construction, the product of individual consciousness resulting in the existence of multiple realities.

Traditionally for many people, 'good' management research conformed to the positivist, scientific approach that assumes that research can identify the 'truth' and measure its properties using objective methods. Although long challenged in fields such as education and social policy, this approach has remained dominant in the field of management (Gill and Johnson, 1997, Skinner *et al.*, 2000). The limitations of the positivist approach identified in the social sciences are raised in the context of evaluation by authors such as Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Patton (1990) and are equally applicable in any management study which is essentially about people, both individuals and groups within or related to organisational settings, who experience the world and for whom contexts and values are crucial.

Treating people as objects ignores their ability to reflect on problems and situations, and act upon this. (Robson, 1993, p. 60).

If we are to understand the processes within organisations, in particular why they occur, it is neither feasible nor desirable to seek to exclude or control factors. Such an approach would severely limit our ability to understand the complexity and interdependence within a situation. Rather, we need to adopt an holistic view (Cassell and Symon, 1994: Polkinghorne, 1991) which takes account of the 'subject's meaning and interpretational systems in order to gain explanation by understanding' (Gill and Johnson, 1997, p. 37).

On this basis, a stance towards the opposite end of the pairing would appear appropriate for this research study. However, the opposing view as embodied in the purely constructivist position is not entirely satisfactory either. At its extreme, it denies the existence of concrete entities, arguing that reality is purely an individual construct and that

social reality, in so far as it is recognised to have any existence outside the consciousness of any single individual, is regarded as being little more than a network of assumptions and inter-subjectively shared meanings (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, p. 30-31).

In the context of research that focuses on an organisation, its systems and processes, this is not a particularly helpful stance. It does not recognise the possibility that structures and events may have some form of independent existence and which the respondents involved in the research would perceive as fairly concrete and tangible entities, albeit with some acceptance that their individual perceptions and experiences of each may vary, which may impact upon the research.

As Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1991, p. 43) note the 'reality of research also involves a lot of compromises between these pure positions' and a number of authors do identify ontological positions that offer a bridge between the realist – nominalist extremes. Bhaskar (1978, p. 13) argues for an approach to scientific enquiry which he terms

transcendental realism. He distinguishes between structures and mechanisms, events and experiences on the basis that structures are independent of the events that they generate while events often occur independently of experiences. As outlined in Table 3.1, he suggests the existence of three overlapping domains within the context of which mechanisms, events and experiences occur.

Table 3. 1 Three Overlapping Domains

	Domain of Real	Domain of Actual	Domain of Empirical
Structures/mechanisms	☆		
Events	☆	☆	
Experiences	☆	☆	☆

Source: Adapted from Bhaskar (1978, p. 13)

Outhwaite (1987) argues for a mid-point, which he terms (rather confusingly) realism, in which social scientists can focus on an object of inquiry which has already been defined in lay language and can attempt to identify the underlying causal mechanisms which result in a particular outcome in real, experienced events. Critical theory as summarised by Guba and Lincoln (1994) offers a useful mid-point as it acknowledges the existence of a reality shaped by a variety of factors over time (social, political, economic, cultural, ethnic, gender) and which is crystallised in structures and frameworks that are ‘real’.

This study seeks to explore a complex people-oriented process (evaluation) that is in itself an assessment and interpretation of a complex people-oriented process (HRM change initiative) and, as such, the subjective experience of individuals is key to gaining understanding. An holistic approach is necessary to fully explore the complexity of the situation and, therefore, a non-positivist stance is appropriate (Remenyi *et al.*, 1998). However, the need to encompass as many variables as possible also necessitates awareness of context in terms of organisational structure and systems. The acceptance of the existence of both an individual subjective reality and some

degree of objective reality as described by the mid-points of Outhwaite (1987) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) enables recognition of the structures and mechanisms which are present within an organisation and which may or may not impact on events, whether or not they are experienced by a particular individual. In this way, it becomes possible to acknowledge and incorporate the existence of aspects that are observable and measurable together with those which can only be explored through the experiences and perceptions of individuals.

3.2.2. Epistemology

Gill and Johnson (1997) suggest the possibility of a research methods continuum based on Burrell and Morgan's (1979) definitions of nomothetic and ideographic methodologies. Nomothetic methodologies emphasise highly structured, deductive, etic (outside) approaches for the generation and use of quantitative data to test hypotheses. Conversely, ideographic methodologies place emphasis on inductive, emic (inside) approaches to generate qualitative data from research in everyday settings in order to gain explanation through understanding.

The desire to undertake empirical exploration of the reality of an evaluation process in the context of an HRM initiative required research which had the characteristics of the ideographic categorisation for the following reasons:

- **Deductive vs. Inductive** -the importance of differentiating between deductive and inductive resides in decisions about the appropriate starting point for any project, whether it is acceptable and feasible to identify an hypotheses to test or whether a more open, exploratory approach would be more productive for the purpose of the research under consideration. Deductive approaches begin with the identification of the research question or problem and attempt to identify a probable solution or explanation using conceptual and theoretical frameworks. The proposed solution/explanation, often in the form of hypotheses, is then

tested for accuracy through controlled empirical observation (Gill and Johnson, 1997). Not surprisingly, this approach has been closely associated with the positivist, scientific paradigm and they share similar criticisms. Inductive approaches do not begin with a solution but rather seek to explore the world through empirical observation from which to develop explanations and understanding that are then tested through further empirical research.

There is some suggestion within the literature that there is a clear dichotomy between the two, however, Blaikie (1993) draws attention to the fact that the division may not be as clear-cut as it first appears, a belief which supports Gill and Johnson's (1997) suggestion of a continuum rather than a divide. As Blaikie notes, authors such as Salmon (1988) and O'Hear (1989) argue that some inductive reasoning must be involved in the choice of theory and conceptual frameworks necessary for deductive research. While authors such as Popper (1961) and Hempel (1966) question a researcher's ability ever to be completely inductive not least because, in order to research something, we must first have thought about it. In addition, the requirement to further test the data findings following analysis which is inherent in the inductive approach infers a deductive process, at least in part.

In relation to an academic thesis as presented here, the comments of Popper (1961) and Hempel (1966) have relevance as it is necessary to have considered the area at some length in order to choose and refine the topic to be researched to ensure that it meets the requirements necessary for a PhD study. However, the exploratory nature of a research project which seeks to identify and understand the complexity of processes in real contexts, and where previous work is limited, thereby restricting the researcher's ability to frame hypotheses, clearly places it towards the inductive end of the continuum.

- **Etic/Emic** this divide reflects the difference between research conducted from an outsider or insider perspective. An etic investigation would adopt a non-participant, scientific researcher view seeking to test hypotheses based on categories derived from outside the subject's world prior to the research taking place. An emic approach seeks to 'capture the insider's perspective on reality' (Patton, 1990, p. 241) through identification of the respondents' categories and meanings for behaviour and attitudes. By its very nature, a case study approach concentrates on the emic, focusing on what is happening and what is deemed important within the boundaries of the case as defined.
- **Qualitative/Quantitative** - the subject of this research is a complex, messy and people-oriented process. I am not solely concerned with factual data but also need to understand the assessments that the individuals have made based on their own experience. Work which is purely quantitative limits our ability to understand the purposes and meanings that people attach to events, experiences and activities with which they are involved (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1994), It tends to rely on research instruments which are inflexible, leave little opportunity for pursuing the unexpected and can take only limited account of context.

A qualitative approach was the most appropriate choice to explore the processes of evaluation enabling a

focus on naturally occurring ordinary events in natural settings so that we have a strong handle on what 'real life' is like' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.10, emphasis in original).

Qualitative research is well-suited to exploring the complexities and processes of situations (Marshall and Rossman, 1989) because as Patton (1990, p. 95) observes

depicting process requires detailed descriptions; the experience of process typically varies for different people; process is fluid and dynamic; and participants' perspectives are a key process consideration

There were two further arguments in favour of a qualitative study; the first was the importance of context in understanding both the decisions made within organisations and the reactions of the individuals, as Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 10) note in qualitative research

the influences of local context are not stripped away, but are taken into account. The possibility for understanding latent, underlying, or non-obvious issues is strong ...we can go far beyond 'snapshots' of 'what?' or 'how many?' to just how and why things happen as they do.

The second dimension that offered further support for a qualitative approach was the nature of the subject itself. Evaluation is not only something which occurs as an organisational process but is also something which individuals experience as part of their everyday lives and, as such, is personal to them. The nature of this research project quite clearly necessitates recognition of the importance of context and the individual perceptions and experiences of the people involved. Unusually, in this case, these are issues which need to be considered in the context of not only the research project but which also form an integral part of the phenomenon being studied. Much of the theory and empirical work on evaluation undertaken by authors such as Guba and Lincoln (1989), Patton (1990) and Stake (1995), reinforce the benefits that qualitative approaches offer in conducting evaluations. Thus, a qualitative approach had advantages not only because of the nature of the data needed but also because of its compatibility and utility within the subject area.

3.3. Case Studies

Yin (1994, p. 13) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates

- A contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when
- The boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

He suggests that case studies have an advantage when 'a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a 'contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little

or no control' (p. 9). Saunders *et al.* (1997, p. 76) suggest that case studies are particularly useful to gain 'a rich understanding of the context of the research and the processes being enacted,' while Torracco (1997) and Gummesson (1988) identify the benefits of an holistic view of a process offered through a case study approach.

Case studies, more than other methods of study, allow researchers to focus specifically on a phenomenon of interest, and they offer the greatest potential for revealing the richness, holism and complexity of naturally occurring events (Torracco, 1997, p. 130)

The richness and complexity emerge because case studies provide 'multi-perspectival analyses' (Tellis, 1997, p. 5) with the researcher considering not only the voice and perspective of the actors but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them.

Thus, a case study approach was appropriate in the context of this research project which clearly sought an understanding of real-life processes within their context to explore 'how' and 'why' barriers to evaluation occurred within the context of HRM initiatives. However, as Hartley (1994) usefully highlights, the case study approach should be viewed as a research strategy, rather than a method, encompassing as it does the possibility of using a range of research methods to focus on a specific event or situation (Bell, 1993). It is possible for the emphasis to be either quantitative or qualitative (and there are many aspects of Yin's (1994) case study approach which lean towards the positivist and experimental) although the emphasis is generally on the experimental due to the 'why' questions case studies are usually used to explore (Hartley, 1994).

For the reasons already outlined in this chapter, an inductive, emic, qualitative case study approach (Merriman, 1988; Yin, 1994) was the most appropriate choice and the four essential characteristics of qualitative case studies suggested by Merriman (1988) fit the purpose of this research:

1. They focus on a particular situation, event, programme or phenomenon.
2. The end product is a rich description of the phenomenon under study.
3. They illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study.
4. They rely on inductive reasoning.

A further choice to be made is that between single or multiple case study design. Yin (1994) describes single case studies as being appropriate in revelatory cases (where phenomenon has not been accessible before), as a critical case in which a well-formulated theory is tested, in an extreme or unique case, or as a pilot study in preparation for further research. However, Remenyi *et al.* (1998) argue that multiple case studies produce findings which are more robust because, as Hartley (1994) notes, within a single case study, it is difficult to separate what is unique to that organisation from what may be common to other organisations. A broader exercise including multiple case studies is more likely to lead to 'interesting generalisations about the phenomenon under investigation' (Remenyi *et al.*, 1998, p. 134), although the term 'generalisation' is the subject of some debate in the context of non-positivist qualitative research and issues of quality and credibility.

3.4. Quality

An important concern for any research, whether quantitative or qualitative, is that of quality – how good is it? Within the positivist tradition, assessment of research quality is on the basis of internal and external validity, objectivity and reliability (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), criteria which are less appropriate for research in which there is no single 'truth', subjectivity is an integral part of the research design, and only a small number of cases are involved.

3.4.1. External validity

In positivist research, external validity or the ability to generalise from findings to a wider population is an important criterion and it is a subject that is widely discussed

within the qualitative research field. Despite in many ways tending towards the positivist in his approach, Yin (1994) justly argues that this concept cannot apply in case study research in the way that it does in statistical research. As Tellis (1997) notes, both Hamel *et al.* (1993) and Yin (1994) strongly argue that the relative size of sample, whether two, ten or one hundred case studies, does not transform multiple case study research into a macroscopic study. Nor is that a significant problem because

the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size.
(Patton, 1990, p. 185)

Increasingly, the attempts of authors such as Yin (1994) to emulate positivist social science by pursuing multiple case studies in the belief that, through random sampling, these can represent larger populations are subject to criticism (Knights and McCabe, 1998). As Stake (1995, p. 4) states 'case study research is not sampling research, we do not study a case primarily to understand other cases'.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) argue that the term 'fittingness' is more appropriate and suggest the question which should be asked is whether the results of the research could be transferred to other situations, but warn that emerging hypotheses are very much context-related and cannot be transferred without a detailed knowledge of the original context. Stake (1978) terms this understanding of the particular 'naturalistic generalisation', which is arrived at through recognition of similarities in issues, and argues that experience enables individuals to use both tacit knowledge of situations and explicit comparisons between those same situations to form useful naturalistic generalisations (Schofield, 1993).

The detailed knowledge of the organization and especially the knowledge about the *processes* underlying the behaviour and its *context* can help to specify the conditions under which the behaviour can be expected to occur. In other words, generalization is about theoretical propositions not populations. (Hartley, 1994, p. 225, emphasis in original).

3.4.2. Internal validity

In his consideration of internal validity, Yin (1994) focuses on the importance of testing inferences made and conclusions drawn to ensure that important variables have not been overlooked. Lincoln and Guba (1989) describe this as *credibility or truth value* and identify the problems associated with bias of the researcher and participants and the distortions that can arise from the researcher/subject relationship. Although the perspectives differ, the concern is similar - that the audience should believe that the findings are credible. Within this study, this concern was addressed during data collection in the act of 'checking back' with those interviewed and the use of multiple sources of evidence, plus the longitudinal aspect of the cases which served to expose deficiencies and contradictions in both the data and my interpretations. In addition, the findings of each case were shared with the relevant participants/sponsors once data collection and initial analysis were complete.

In rejecting the idea of one identifiable truth, objectivity becomes a position that it is impossible to attain or defend, but as Patton (1990) notes, there are negative connotations often associated with perceptions of subjectivity. He offers the concept of neutrality as a viable alternative. Credible research, he suggests, requires that the researcher seek to

understand the world as it is, to be true to its complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and to be balanced in reporting both confirming and disconfirming evidence (p. 55).

Neutrality should not, however, be confused with empathy which, he argues, is an integral part of any qualitative enquiry and which will be considered later in this chapter.

3.4.3. Reliability

The criterion of reliability encompasses the concept of consistency in terms of both the ability of the measurement procedure to yield the same answer whenever it is carried out (Kirk and Miller, 1986) and whether another investigator following the same procedures would arrive at the same conclusions. This does not offer a useful way of

assessing research quality in the context of case studies. Each case is unique, because the combination of values, culture, and individuals cannot be the same in different situations. Nor do organisations and situations remain stationary over time - 'it is not possible to step into the same river twice'. In addition, any attempt to produce a standard set of results which could be reproduced exactly by someone else fails to recognise a fundamental aspect of the non-positivist approach, recognition of the influence of the individual researcher's experience, perspectives and attributes or the role choices that the researcher makes. All discourse is contextual, immediate and grounded in the concrete specifics of the situation created by the interaction (Denzin, 1997) and these dialogues cannot be repeated, they 'are always first-time occurrences; each attempt at repetition creates a new experience' (Denzin, 1997, p. 36). It would, therefore, be impossible for another researcher to recreate exactly the same piece of research and produce identical outcomes.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) offer an alternative, and more appropriate, criterion of consistency which can be obtained through use of multiple data sources and through establishing an audit trail which would permit another researcher both to understand the decisions taken during the course of the research and to verify that they made sense in the light of the available data pool.

3.4.4. Construct validity

Yin (1994) also identifies construct validity (establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied) as a criterion for judging the quality of qualitative research and suggests three tactics to increase its presence in a research study: establishing a chain of evidence (the audit trail already considered under reliability), use of multiple sources of evidence, and having a draft report reviewed by key informants. The use of multiple sources of data or triangulation of evidence is also recommended by others (for example, Eisenhardt, 1989; Lincoln and Guba, 1994; Patton, 1990; Stake, 1995) who argue that it is an important means of corroborating

findings, in essence providing multiple measures of a phenomenon and increasing the credibility of findings. However, there is a need to exercise some caution in the use of this term and to recognise that it is doubtful whether different types of evidence are actually measuring the exact same thing, as would be the case in the original sense of triangulation in the context of navigational readings (Blaikie, 1991: Guba and Lincoln, 1989: Mathison, 1988). Nevertheless, multiple sources of evidence are useful in that they enable us to broaden our understanding and move closer towards the holistic description and explanation desired in this type of enquiry. They increase the richness of the data and each set of findings is likely either to expand or to challenge results from other sets, thereby testing the ideas and theories that are emerging and so increasing the credibility of the ultimate findings. Marshall and Rossman (1989, p. 146) suggest that a multiple case study design offers another form of triangulation.

Designing a study in which multiple cases are used, multiple informants or more than one data gathering technique can greatly strengthen the study's usefulness for other settings.

Chenail (1997, p. 1) develops this further, suggesting that the 'circular process' of comparing and contrasting the knowledge of the phenomenon that exists within the field, the literature and the researcher's personal experience forms 'the triangulatory engine of qualitative inquiry'. This usefully recognises the sense-making process which occurs in this type of research study wherein the role of the researcher as interpreter is acknowledged and both multiple data sources and the literature are used as part of an iterative process to understand how emergent findings fit into larger contexts.

Yin (1994) suggests allowing key informants to review an initial draft of the report as a means of corroborating the essential facts and evidence, any disagreements being settled through a search for further evidence. Yin maintains that this process will enhance the accuracy of the study, thereby increasing the construct validity and decreasing the likelihood of false reporting, an argument which rests on an assumption that a single interpretation is possible. In a situation where no objective truth exists 'as

when different participants ...have different renditions of the same events' (p. 146), he suggests that the procedure should help to identify the various perspectives that can then be represented in the case study report. Yin does not consider the difficulties which may be caused by the reaction of individuals who wish to reconsider earlier opinions they had expressed, not on the basis of factual inaccuracy, but on the basis of political or personal sensitivity. It seems unlikely that further evidence could offer a resolution to such a situation, although the conflict in itself may offer a further level of 'richness' for the researcher. Difficulties could arise, however, if this resulted in attempts to influence the case study report or compromised the position of the researcher.

3.4.5. The Role Of The Researcher – Preference and Bias

As noted in relation to internal validity, the nature of the relationship between researcher and subject and the possibility of bias on the part of the researcher are issues that require explicit consideration in the context of non-positivist, qualitative research. Inevitably, the choice of ontological and epistemological stance influences the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. There are a variety of roles which can be undertaken by the researcher which range from the objective, data analyst, model-building role through to that of an organisational actor immersed in the stream of events and activities (Evered and Louis, 1991). An acceptance that there can be multiple interpretations of a situation recognises that human beings interpret their observations and experiences through the filters of their own knowledge, experience, expectations and values. This also necessitates understanding that the same must be true for researchers, whether involved in quantitative or qualitative work. Thus, the investigator and those being investigated are interactively linked and the findings are inevitably influenced by that interaction. As Cassell and Symon (1994) observe, the researcher is not an uninvolved bystander but a social being who impacts on the behaviour of those with whom (s)he is involved and,

as Stake (1994) suggests, a case study is both the process of learning about the case and a product of our own learning,

because the researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry, a qualitative report must include information about the researcher. (Patton, 1990, p. 472)

Given the source of my interest in the subject and my own management background, any attempt to approach this research without some preformed thoughts and ideas about the subject was unrealistic. If in reality it is not possible for the researcher to enter a setting *tabula rasa*, then the level and role of pre-understanding need to be considered both in terms of knowledge of the theory and the setting in which the research is to take place.

Hartley (1994) argues that, at the very least, a primitive theoretical framework is necessary if a case study is to produce findings that have any wider significance rather than degenerating into a simple descriptive story. Whyte (1984, p. 225) maintains that unless research is guided 'by good ideas about how to focus the study and analyse those data ...[the] project will yield little of value', although Van Maanen *et al.* (1986) do caution against prior commitment to particular theoretical models. In this study, the literature was used inductively (Creswell, 1994) to become a 'smart researcher', to gain maximum awareness and to be able to recognise leads without being led (Morse, 1994). Given the limited nature of the existing theory and previous empirical work, the research sought to explore the area of interest in a non-experimental way with an openness to whatever there was to be found. Consequently, it was important that the dimensions and inter-relationships should be allowed to emerge from the data that had been gathered. This approach is supported by authors such as Eisenhardt (1989), Gummesson (1988) and Patton (1990) who sound warnings 'because preordained theoretical perspectives or propositions may bias and limit the findings' (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 536).

Morse (1994) warns against researching within an organisation where one is an employee, primarily because of conflicts of interest and roles, while authors such as Gummesson (1988) argue the benefits of pre-understanding that sensitises the researcher to the reality of relationships and factors within an organisation, not least the appropriate method and level of access. On a very pragmatic level, pre-understanding enhances the speed with which a researcher establishes herself within a research setting, some familiarity with culture, structure, process and jargon assists in the building of rapport and establishing of credibility. Patton (1990, p. 56) argues the importance of empathy on the part of the researcher 'being able to take and understand the stance, position, feelings, experiences and world view of others'. However, it is important that this pre-understanding occurs at a conscious level, is continually questioned and challenged by the researcher who needs to be receptive to change. For, as Patton (1990, p. 55) argues

the researcher should not set out to prove a particular perspective ... the investigator's commitment is to understand the world as it is, to be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge.

In each case during the research, my pre-understanding was tested in a number of ways, during the data collection process by its compatibility with what was said and observed, through referencing back to participants my understanding of what had been said and their acceptance or challenging of that understanding, during data analysis by reflecting on what emerged and how that did or did not mesh with my pre-understanding.

3.5. Research Design

In the previous section I explained the methodological approach of both the study and myself as the researcher. In this section I describe and justify the research methods that were used. The choice of case studies is explained and methods of data collection are outlined. A common criticism of qualitative work is that the research report fails to explain how the process of analysis, which resulted in the emergence of the reported

conclusions, was conducted. This section seeks to explain in some detail the procedure which was followed, using the first case study as an illustration. The same basic approach was used for each case study and for the cross-case comparison.

3.5.1. Multiple Cases

In Marshall and Rossman's (1989) terms, this research study was exploratory in that it set out to investigate a phenomenon which was little understood in the field of management but it was also explanatory in that it sought to understand the events, beliefs, attitudes and policies that were shaping the phenomenon. On this basis, each case study was in itself instrumental (Stake, 1994) in that it sought to provide insight into a particular issue or phenomenon. However, in order to gain a deeper insight into the phenomenon of interest, Stake (1994) suggests a collective case study approach in which a number of cases are chosen because the researcher believes that they will contribute to a better understanding and will maximise what can be learned in the period of time available for study.

3.5.2. Choice of Case Study Organisations

For this study, case studies were undertaken in three public sector service organisations. The decision to focus on the public sector was made on the basis of two principal factors. Firstly, that the nature of this sector incorporated a greater need for, and expectation of, accountability that might reasonably be expected to have raised awareness of issues relating to evaluation. Secondly, my own background and interest in the public sector meant I had varying degrees of pre-understanding which were helpful both for negotiating access to the organisations and for making good use of the time I had available.

The number of cases included needed to be realistic in that limited resources were available for conducting the study, one researcher and finite time, but also needed to be sufficient to allow cross-case comparison to aid understanding. The most significant

requirement in each case was that an evaluation of an HRM initiative implemented within the organisation was being undertaken. Given that the literature had indicated such evaluations were rare, I decided it was impractical to seek three organisations undertaking evaluation of exactly the same initiative, for example, empowerment. Indeed, even had I been able to identify three such organisations, it is almost certain that the uniqueness of each situation would have outweighed any surface level similarities. On this basis, it was more productive to identify case studies that would add to my overall understanding of the barriers to the evaluation of HRM initiatives.

The literature offers a number of issues and criteria to be considered when identifying research sites. Miles and Huberman (1994) draw attention to the difficulties of establishing the scope of a qualitative study, however, this did not pose a problem in this research as the focus on evaluation of a specific initiative in each case provided natural and clear-cut boundaries. Marshall and Rossman (1989) define a number of pragmatic criteria for the perfect site:

- Entry is possible.
- There is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programme interactions and /or structures that are of interest will be present.
- The researcher can devise an appropriate role to maintain continuity of presence for as long as necessary.

Each of the cases chosen fulfilled these criteria, although it should be noted that the role that I adopted was not always the same due both to the nature of my access and the development of my own understanding about the nature of this type of research

The three organisations used varied in size and in the scope of the evaluation studied. The first organisation, PVS, is a public sector service organisation in the higher education field employing approximately 3,000 staff in its central location where this study took place. The organisation was seeking, with the help of external consultants,

to evaluate an HRM initiative that focused on 'Fair Selection' procedures for staff. The initiative directly affected a segment of the staff in the organisation (those involved in recruitment), but, due to the nature of the initiative, indirectly affected the whole organisation. It had spanned a five-year period although the evaluation project, and my involvement, did not begin until the fifth year. At the time of the research, I was an employee of the organisation, although with no direct connection to the area being researched. Access was negotiated on the basis of my observing the process as it developed over time, although for reasons already discussed, the role quickly developed into that of observer/participant.

The second organisation, ABC, was chosen because the initiative concerned directly affected the whole organisation and was being evaluated solely by external consultants, thus offering an opportunity for any issues caused by these two factors to emerge. The organisation is a Government 'Next Steps' Agency providing services to the public. It employs approximately 60,000 staff nation-wide and staff representing a variety of sites were included in the study. The initiative being evaluated was the empowerment of staff throughout the organisation that had also taken place over a five-year period and once again both the evaluation and my involvement began in the fifth year. In this case, I was part of a consultancy team of two, undertaking an evaluation on behalf of the organisation, and therefore actively and visibly involved, but within that, pursuing my own research interest, a fact which was made clear to all participants and agreed at the outset with the sponsor. This role required more negotiation with the sponsor than in the first or third cases to ensure both research interests were met without either being unduly compromised.

The third organisation, NJD, is a Further Education College and differed from the previous organisations in a number of ways. It was considerably smaller, employing approximately 450 staff in total, based in one geographical location, albeit on three

sites. The HRM initiative was limited to a small number of staff and had been implemented over a much shorter timescale (nine months) than the previous two cases. This organisation had introduced a mentoring initiative for new staff and a sole internal evaluator, who had also been responsible for implementing the initiative, was undertaking the evaluation. Access was agreed on the basis that I would act as an independent observer/participant and would provide a report based on my observations to the internal evaluator at the end of the evaluation. In all three cases, the reasons for my interest were made explicit to everyone involved from the beginning and undertakings to preserve confidentiality when reporting on the cases were given.

3.5.3. Sample of Stakeholders in Case Study Organisations

In each case, an initial set of stakeholders in the evaluation was identified who would be interviewed and these tended to be individuals most visibly involved, usually those actually managing the process. Decisions about who to interview were made using what Burgoyne (1994) describes as a stakeholder analysis, stakeholders being 'people who have a stake - a vested interest - in evaluation findings' (Patton, 1997, p. 41). Each individual was interviewed and, as part of the discussion, asked to identify who he/she saw as important in the process, other stakeholders, who were then interviewed in turn wherever possible. This provided a useful way of ensuring all useful contributors were included and in achieving what Rubin and Rubin (1995) term 'completeness'. Interviewees were added with the intention of fully understanding the phenomenon. Key stakeholders, those most actively involved, were interviewed on a number of occasions throughout the project, so providing evidence of changes which occurred over time in response to the unfolding evaluation process. Table 3.2 provides further details of those who were interviewed in each case.

Table 3. 2 Details of Those Interviewed in Each Case Study

Case Study One – PVS	Case Study Two - ABC	Case Study Three - NJD
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• liP Project Director• Director Of Equal Opportunities Unit• 2 x liP Project Team Members• 2 x Trainers• Head of Training• 2 x consultants• Desk Work Researcher• Manager and recruiter• 2 x recruits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ABC Senior Management Development Consultant, champion of the project,• The first CE, original champion of empowerment• Chair of the Management Development Group, Area Director• 3x Area Directors• Director of Personnel (retired 1995)• Head of Personnel Branch <p>As part of the evaluation project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 75 staff across senior management, middle management, junior management and clerical staff grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff Training And Development Manager, champion of the project,• Personnel Manager• Chief Executive• 3 x Lecturer and Mentor• Lecturer and Mentee• Manager and Mentee• Administrator and Mentee• Manager

3.6. Data Collection

In order to gain the most detailed understanding possible, and to ensure quality in the research as discussed earlier, data were collected in a variety of ways in each of the cases: through in-depth interviews, focus groups, observation and/or participation in meetings, and studying documentary evidence such as letters, reports, memoranda, minutes of meetings and publications.

3.6.1. Interviews

Yin (1994) states that the interview is one of the most important sources of case study information and that most interviews used in a case study investigation are 'of an open-ended nature' (p. 84) in which respondents can be asked for facts and opinions. Patton (1990, p. 278) suggests, this 'qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit', a stance entirely in accord with this research. Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1991) suggest that semi-structured or unstructured interviews are appropriate when the researcher seeks to understand the constructs that the interviewee uses to form beliefs or opinions about

a particular situation or issue and/or to develop an understanding of the respondent's world. Interviews offer a means of exploring what is in someone else's mind, to find out things from them that we cannot directly observe (Patton, 1990). Interviewing is a means of exploring people's perceptions and gaining some understanding of the way in which they interpret the world.

Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1991) warn that a non-directive interview is unlikely to produce useful data and that researchers need to be clear about the areas of interest that they wish to pursue. As recommended by Rubin and Rubin (1995), prior to each interview I identified some broad issues for discussion, usually on the basis of what had emerged from the preliminary analysis of previous data collected or events relevant to the evaluation which had occurred. However, these were not used in a rigid way but rather as prompts to ensure key areas of interest were explored. Conversations were allowed to develop so that unexpected themes or ideas were captured and to allow my understanding and interpretation to be checked in a natural way. At the end of every interview, the main points were summarised and agreed with the participant.

The exception to this approach occurred in the case of ABC where a slightly more structured approach was adopted for those interviews and focus groups which were specifically conducted as part of the ABC evaluation (see Table 3.2) with the same broad topics being covered each time (Table 3.3)

Table 3. 3 Example of ABC Interview Guide

The individual
Role
Career so far/work experience
How their team fits within the wider organisational structure?
Empowerment
What does it mean to them?
What form does it take - examples
How does it link to the performance of their team/section/dept?
How successful is it and how is success recognised?
What happens if mistakes are made?
Has the management style changed since gaining Agency status – how?
Evaluation
How should the organisation assess the impact of empowerment?
How do you feel about this research project?
What do you think will be done with the information the project produces?
What do you think should be done with it?
Future
What future changes do you see that are likely to affect anything that have talked about so far?

In the context of the evaluation, the volume of interviews required, and the needs of the sponsor, necessitated this degree of structure. In the context of my own research interests, the volume of interviews to be conducted necessitated some data being collected by a fellow researcher and I wished to ensure that my research requirements were met even when I was not present.

3.6.2. Focus Groups

As Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1991) note, it is sometimes appropriate to conduct group rather than one-to-one interviews. In the case of ABC, staff in lower grades were interviewed in small groups (typically eight or nine individuals) for two main reasons: firstly, my knowledge of ABC's culture led me to believe that they would feel less vulnerable expressing their opinions in a group rather than on an individual basis; secondly, the evaluation required that a relatively large number of staff be interviewed and focus groups offered a practical means of achieving this. To increase the degree of

comfort experienced by participants, participation in each group was restricted to one grade, thereby ensuring that tensions caused by the presence of line managers did not occur. Typically, each focus group lasted for an hour and a half to two hours and was held in the office where the majority of the group participants worked. As in the one-to-one interviews in ABC, a 'topic guide' (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1991) was used to provide some structure while still allowing sufficient flexibility for interesting points which arose to be developed (Table 3.4).

Table 3. 4 Topic Guide for ABC Focus Groups

What is empowerment, what does it mean?
How are things done differently now compared with the past?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Culture change?• Management style?
How does empowerment affect performance?
What gets recognised?
What's likely to happen in the future?
How should impact of empowerment be assessed?
How should evaluation findings be used?

The potential limitations of this approach are that views expressed can be constrained by group pressures or that the sense of safety in numbers results in extreme reactions which may not be typical. However, the benefits are that participants can hear and respond to the views of others, thus exposing the extreme or atypical view thereby providing a degree of quality control (Patton, 1990). Possibly the greatest benefit for the researcher is the wealth and richness of data which can be elicited in a relatively short space of time.

3.6.3. Meetings

Remenyi *et al.*, (1998) suggest that observation is a valuable way of collecting reliable evidence as it allows the researcher to observe directly the relevant interaction, behavioural and environmental conditions. Within PVS and NJD, there were some

occasions when I was able to observe meetings that took place in relation to the evaluation (Table 3.5).

Table 3. 5 Meetings Observed

PVS	NJD
4 x meetings between the liP project Team and the Consultants 2 x focus groups facilitated by the consultants	2 x meetings of Evaluation Working Party

In each case, I was present at the invitation of the project sponsor and was allowed to use audiotapes to record the proceedings. Meetings were useful in offering a source of additional information and a further means of triangulation. However, the main benefit was the opportunity to observe behaviours and the interactions that occurred between the key players, thereby gaining valuable insight into the relationships and the underlying sensitivities.

3.6.4. Documentary Evidence

As Patton (1990) and Yin (1994) suggest, documentary evidence was important in these case studies, particularly in exploring the context of the initiative and the evaluation. In each case a variety of documents were used (for example, internal organisational reports, minutes of meetings, memoranda, strategy statements) to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources (Remenyi *et al.*, 1998) and to establish the sequence of events in each case.

3.6.5. Recording The Data

In each of the case studies, every face-to-face interview, focus group and some meetings were tape-recorded with the agreement of participants and written notes were made. Although, in some cases, the process of being recorded made interviewees more nervous, this tended to wear off quite quickly and most people appeared unaffected once they became absorbed in the discussion. Field notes also included observations or thoughts that occurred to me during the data collection process. For each set of data, a one-sheet summary form (Table 3.6) based on the first write-

up/reading was completed as soon as possible after collection, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), to ensure that any thoughts and reflections were captured.

Table 3. 6 Summary Form

Contact Type:	
Site	Date
Main themes/issues emerging from this contact	
Anything that struck you as particularly interesting/important about this contact	
New issues/questions resulting from this contact and to whom they should be directed	

As they were collected, all data produced by interviews, meetings and focus groups were transcribed to enable entry into the NUD.IST software programme, which provided a practical way of storing and manipulating large amounts of data. In addition, the use of the NUD.IST package offered a means of contributing to ‘a chain of evidence’ (Yin, 1994, p. 34), and increasing the construct validity of the research as the process of building the NUD.IST data tree and making memos against nodes reflects the reasoning behind the decisions made and conclusions arrived at.

3.7. *Analysing the Data*

Easterby-Smith *et al.*, (1991) identify two principal ways of analysing qualitative data, which they refer to as content analysis and grounded theory; the latter they describe as an holistic approach particularly suitable for dealing with transcripts (the dominant source of data in this study). This type of approach to the data does not seek to impose a structure but to derive the themes, patterns and concepts from within the data themselves and was therefore compatible with the intention of being open to whatever was there to be found. Indeed, Boyatzis (1998, p. 9) argues that ‘researchers must be open to all information’ if the identification of themes is to be possible. The approach used to analyse the data is captured in Boyatzis’ (1998) thematic analysis wherein the

raw data are used to generate themes or patterns that, at a minimum, describe and *organise observations and, at a maximum, interpret aspects of the phenomenon.*

Thematic analysis begins with 'sensing themes' (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 11) within the data, progressing through the development of codes to the interpretation of the information and themes in order to contribute to the development of knowledge.

Coding began primarily at the descriptive level and the summary forms (Table 3.6) proved useful in highlighting interesting themes to be followed up, gaps in information and served as a quick reminder when returning to the data. From the descriptive coding progressed to the identification of more complex themes and patterns as my familiarity with both the cases and the data increased. Hartley (1994) advises that the checking of constructs and theories against various sources of evidence helps prevent bias caused by early impressions. The categories derived from the data in each case were considered in the light of the findings from previous data collection for both commonality and inconsistency. In Cases Two and Three the data were analysed and *coded within case before being considered in the light of the findings from the previous cases.* The intention was to maintain an openness to what was contained within the data, thereby allowing new thoughts to emerge, which might not have been the case if the data had simply been considered within the confines of a framework created by the previous findings. In addition to comparison within, and between cases, the themes and patterns which were being identified were also compared with the literature, both to refine categories and to look for relationships which might be expected to exist, based on what had, or had not, already been found but also, as a means of reflecting on the emerging findings to encourage deeper insight, which in turn served to reinforce the credibility of the findings (Eisenhardt, 1989).

3.7.1. The Process Of Analysis

Although Tesch (1990, p. 96) suggests that analysis 'always begins with reading all the data to get a sense of the whole', part of the process begins earlier with the initial

analysis of each piece of data as it is collected and transcribed, what Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1991) describe as 'familiarisation', and which is important for identifying first thoughts about key ideas and issues. The collection of data for each case study and the transcription of all the interview, meeting and focus group material enabled me to develop an ongoing familiarity with the data and to identify gaps and inconsistencies that could be explored in future data collection. However, only when data collection was complete was it possible to read the whole story. On the basis of the first reading, I produced a descriptive account of events in each of these cases. This enabled me to begin to identify the overall pattern of events and the main themes and draw together my early thoughts and reflections on the basis of an overview of a case study.

Tesch (1990, p. 96) suggests that 'the data segments are categorized according to an organizing system that is predominantly derived from the data themselves.' Once I had gained an overview, the next stage was to begin to analyse the data in depth to identify patterns and inconsistencies and to assign codes or labels. All the transcribed data were entered into NUD.IST in their entirety for coding. However, much of the secondary documentation did not exist in word-processed form and the volume was too great to permit complete transcription. Secondary documentation was therefore coded manually and cross-referenced as appropriate within NUD.IST. Paragraphs rather than single words or sentences were used as the basic unit of analysis as this ensured that the context of words was preserved and was clear when the information attached to categories was revisited at later stages. One of the most useful features of NUD.IST is that it enables 'cutting up a copy of field notes into segments, each containing a potentially important segment' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 58), without the need to copy or to destroy the original. Wishing to be open to whatever was to be found in the data, I sought to identify the categories from within each set of data rather than impose an objectively derived framework at the outset.

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that there are three classes of codes beginning with broad descriptive codes, followed by interpretive (which Miles and Huberman (1994) describe as reflecting the underlying motives or dynamics in situations) and then pattern codes which are even more inferential and explanatory (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Following the guidance of Miles and Huberman (1994), Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Tesch (1990), I began analysis of the first case study by identifying broad themes in the data in order to produce an initial descriptive code which required little interpretation (Table 3.7).

Table 3. 7 Illustration of Initial Descriptive Codes For Case Study One - PVS

Nodes		Sub nodes	
1. History/context of organisation	1.1	Organisational background	
	1.2	Initiative's objectives	
	1.3	Implementation of initiative	
	1.4	Current evaluation practice	
	1.5	Previous evaluation experience	1.5.1 Organisational 1.5.2 Individual
	1.6	Equal opportunities	
	1.7	liP	
2 Objectives	2.1	Scope	
	2.2	Motives	
3. Consultants	3.1	Use of	
	3.2	PVS perspective	
	3.3	Consultants perspective	
4. Stakeholders	4.1	Who is?	
	4.2	How viewed?	
5. Relationships	5.1	Within senior team	
	5.2	Within liP team	
	5.3	liP and senior team	
	5.4	liP team and training	
	5.5	liP team and personnel	
	5.6	liP and management	
6. Timescales	6.1	Hindrances	
7. Control	7.1	Individual ownership	
	7.2	Senior management	
	7.3	Lack of direction	
	7.4	Competing priorities	
8. Resistance	8.1	Culture	
	8.2	Management	
	8.3	Training	
9. Outcomes	9.1	Expected	
	9.2	Actual	9.2.1 Perceptions 9.2.2 Anticipated future use
	9.3	Changes in expectations	
	9.4	Informal assessment	
	9.5	Limitations	
	9.6	Communication	9.6.1 Usually within the organisation 9.6.2 About the evaluation 9.6.3 About the outcomes 9.6.3.1 Actual 9.6.3.2 Expected
	10.1	To evaluation	10.1.1 For 10.1.2 Against
	10.2	To Initiative	10.2.1 For 10.2.2 Against
11. Process			
12. Researcher Impact			

Source: NUD.IST printout for PVS project

However, it quickly became necessary to refine the coding further as the original categories proved too broad. It also became clear that rather than being able to focus on each class of code separately, interpretative and pattern categories were beginning to emerge during the process of considering broad descriptive codes and it would have been artificial and unproductive to have ignored these early insights. My experience of coding was as a dynamic, iterative process which moved between the three types of code each time data were analysed, and then re-analysed, in the light of further discoveries, some codes becoming redundant over time while others were developed or created to reflect new understandings (an example of such development is shown in Table 3.8).

Table 3.8 The Transition From Descriptive Code To Explanation

Descriptive Code	Underlying Theme	Explanation
<p>Code - Resistance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management <p>Definition <i>Unsupportive of evaluation activity</i></p>	<p>Evaluation = negative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipated attribution of blame • Previous experience • Threat to professional integrity <p>Evaluation = unnecessary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative inherently good • Informal evaluation deems initiative successful • Senior management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Attitude ◦ Behaviour • Perceived lack of resources • Culture • Time pressures 	<p>Blame culture</p> <p>Guilt</p> <p>Lack of incentive for individuals</p> <p>Evaluation not valued or rewarded by organisation</p> <p>Lack of incentive for individuals</p>

As part of validating the coding process, new themes that were identified during the process of analysis were tested across the whole body of data within a case and

across cases to confirm that 'the themes identified are not an episodic or idiosyncratic occurrence' (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 51).

My intention had been to use NUD.IST throughout the process of analysis. As the process progressed, however, I found that while NUD.IST was extremely useful for manipulating data and producing early categories, it was too mechanistic and cumbersome to facilitate the intuitive links I felt I needed to make, with the speed and flexibility with which I wished to make them. Consequently, while NUD.IST was used to produce the early stages of coding, I resorted to manual coding of NUD.IST printouts, and, in some cases interview transcripts, in the later stages.

3.8. Summary

The nature of the research topic and the personal stance of the researcher necessitated a non-positivist, qualitative approach to the collection of data. The limited nature of current understanding of the phenomenon lends itself to an exploratory approach in the sense of being open to what is to be found, but this study also seeks to explain the behaviours, values and events which contribute to the phenomenon. On this basis, a multiple rather than single case research study offered greater potential for identification of a range of factors and the development of an explanation or theory. In each case, data were collected from multiple sources and analysed within case before emerging themes were tested against both the literature and the data from the other cases. This process is mirrored by the presentation in the following chapters, each case is presented firstly as a study in its own right (chapters 4 – 6), followed by a chapter which provides a comparative consideration of the findings from all three cases.

Introduction to the Case Studies

In addition to being a way of collecting evidence, Remenyi *et al.* (1998) describe the role of case studies as a knowledge generation approach in which the telling of the 'story' is key. Presentation of the 'story', they suggest, requires arrangement of the data in an intelligible and engaging way by the 'storyteller', who must then process the evidence to produce a convincing proposition, followed by an explanation of the way that the issues are resolved. A useful case study or story will contribute to an understanding of the world or will explain an interesting phenomenon, thereby making a contribution to knowledge.

An important contribution towards an intelligible presentation is an explanation of the approach that has been adopted and the conventions that have been used to ease understanding on the part of the reader. Each case study is presented in a single chapter (chapters 4 – 6) and appears in the order in which the case studies were undertaken, PVS, followed by ABC, then NJD. An alternative approach would have been to begin with the presentation of what emerged as the least complex case (NJD) and progress to the most complex (PVS). However, as the chronology was significant in the development of ideas and the understanding in each case building upon the previous research and the emerging literature, I believed that coherence and intelligible 'storytelling', in respect of the whole research project, was most likely to be achieved through reflecting the process as it had occurred. Chapter 7 draws together the findings from each of the case studies and discusses the similarities and differences which emerge.

A further complication in achieving clarity of presentation was the need to visually differentiate between quotations taken from the literature and quotations from the evidence collected during the research. Thus, in chapters 4 - 7, certain conventions

have been adopted to distinguish between types of text. All quotes from the literature will appear in Times New Roman font while evidence from the case studies will appear in *Lucinda Sans*, the descriptive body text appears in Arial font and comments (see below) are made in *Arial Italic*. A footnote appears on each page to remind the reader what each font denotes.

It is also important to reflect the diversity of experience, perception and opinion that is inevitable given the nature of evaluation and the initiatives that were the subject of the evaluations considered here. A plurality of views exists that need to be reflected if issues are to be fully exposed, and it is the variety and degree of difference between these perspectives that provide a rich resource (Winter, 1989) for questioning prior assumptions. Thus, the sections reflect different actors' viewpoints, highlighting similarities and differences as appropriate. An additional and distinct perspective is my own, as both researcher and participant in each of the evaluation projects, derived not only from specific data but also from a general awareness of a range of data and issues within and across the organisations set against the thinking in the literature.

Hatch (1996, p. 362) suggests that the most common narrative position adopted by researchers is that of an anonymous observer, in which the reader is invited to 'treat both narrative voice and perspective as if they were transparent' and the voice of the researcher becomes, in effect, invisible. Consequently, the story asserts itself, self-reflection is unnecessary and the narrative act is rendered unquestionable by being placed outside the frame of the discussion. This approach did not seem compatible with the ontological and epistemological stance adopted here (explained in detail in Chapter 3) which required acknowledgement of, and reflection on, the impact of the researcher on the respondents and events. In pursuit of clarity, and to ensure that the voice of the researcher is explicit, I have written about my perspectives and assessments in commentary sections that serve to separate my perspective from those

of individuals and groups within each of the organisations. In order to maintain the integrity of the evidence, the reports of the case studies also include comments and observations of the points at which I was aware that my presence had a direct influence on respondents, whether in terms of decisions made, actions undertaken or simply by causing them to reflect on particular issues.

Remenyi *et al.* (1998) that the initial proposition of the 'story' involves the definition of ideas, variables and concepts, we need to understand the situation in which the events take place. From the literature, it is clear that an evaluation project, and the choices made as part of that project, does not take place in isolation. Any evaluation undertaken in an organisation involves a number of inter-related factors:

- Past history in terms of evaluation and the initiative.
- The purpose of the evaluation.
- A series of activities relating to evaluation.
- The evaluator(s) role.
- The expectations, agendas and degree of participation of the various stakeholders in the initiative.
- Formal and informal outcomes of the initiative and the evaluation.

Each of these factors exists in the context created by the others and needs to be included as part of the data which is gathered if we are to understand the reasoning behind the choices that were made, the process which took place, and the difficulties which existed in the context of these cases. We need to appreciate the starting point, the background to the evaluation, and the influences that exist in the organisational environment, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the decisions that are made and the impact of the process that has been implemented. Therefore, each of the case studies begins with a consideration of the context within which the evaluation project took place, and includes an assessment of the history and culture of the organisation

as they relate to both evaluation and the initiative that is the subject of that evaluation. To aid clarity, the chronology of the evaluation is then depicted in a table that also sets the sequence of evaluation events in the context of other relevant activity within the organisation. The text then considers the choices made about approach, evaluator, participation and use of findings. Obstacles encountered during the implementation of the project are identified and assessed in the context of the case and the findings from the literature. The final section of the chapter summarises the barriers identified within the case in terms of those predicted by the literature, those identified in previous cases and those which are new. Barriers which had been previously identified either in the literature or other cases, but which do not appear in the case under consideration, are also noted.

Chapter 4 Case Study One – PVS

4.1 Introduction

The first case study is set in PVS and considers the evaluation of a 'Fair Selection' programme. The initiative formed a strategic part of the organisation's commitment to equal opportunities and involved the training of all recruiters in fair selection practices. The nature of the initiative, and the context within which the project took place, meant that the evaluation project had wider significance than the assessment of the impact of the initiative itself and, as a result, needed to be broader in scope than simply assessing delivery of a training programme

4.2 The Context

4.2.1 The Organisation

PVS is a public sector service organisation in the higher education sector which, at the time of this research, had been in existence for 25 years. This organisation operates on a number of sites but this case study focuses on the main site, where approximately 3,000 staff are employed. This site has responsibility for the development of policy, regulations and the creation of materials and services to be offered to the consumer. The structure is a complex combination of matrix and hierarchical with a strong dependence on committees for the formation and monitoring of policy.

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4.2.2 The Organisation and Evaluation

The evaluation took place within the context of an organisation which *"is not a very systematic organisation"* (liP Project Director) and which was generally *"not target- and measurement-oriented"* (Manager). In the context of Equal Opportunities, *"very little is done internally, there is quite a lot of subtle qualitative monitoring, but it is done on peer group/shared culture assumptions"* (Director, Equal Opportunities Unit). This absence of formal measurement also extended to training and development. An organisation-wide survey undertaken in 1994 to assess the level of staff development taking place within the organisation demonstrated that the majority of the providers and consumers of training did not have systems or strategies for evaluation beyond end of course reactionnaires. This was reflected in the Training Report of 1994-5 which measured success solely on the basis of quantity and the

extent to which the course met its stated objectives – participant satisfaction with training content, method and environment (p. 25).

Historically, the evaluation of an initiative had tended to be *"informal, sitting-in or hearsay"* (Trainer) to the extent that

reviews of training and development in the past have been done on the nod between the Director of the Equal Opportunities Unit and the Head of Training and Development. They haven't been public. (liP Project Team Member).

An explanation offered by a senior manager for this lack of structured, planned evaluation activity was that, while *"we pride ourselves on being reflective practioners"*, it was in a context where

they are always rushing on to something else and it's questionable whether we ever sit down and really think things through properly. (Director, Equal Opportunities Unit).

An alternative view, however, was that, in terms of assessing the impact of strategy, the omission was due to senior management thinking that they

don't need to evaluate. They think that they are the senior management team; therefore by their very nature what they do is good. (Manager).

Comment: *The majority of staff within this organisation considered themselves professionals responsible for 'policing' their own practice. It is not surprising, therefore, that what was valued within the organisation was informal, personal evaluation - the concept of the individual as a reflective practitioner. In addition to the difficulties caused by lack of time, there are other limitations, which are inherent in a purely personal evaluation, such as individual bias, or incomplete information, which may result in a false assessment of situations because 'they seem to be the most sensible conclusions consistent with the available evidence' (Gilovich, 1991, p. 2). There was certainly evidence (discussed in the next section) that this was occurring in the context of 'Fair Selection'.*

The absence of evaluation activity became an issue for the organisation in 1993 when the commitment was made to achieve the Investors in People (IiP) standard by the end of 1995. *"There would not have been a serious look at evaluation without IiP"* (IiP Project Team Member). The IiP standard required that the senior management of an organisation be committed to developing people, could communicate this commitment to all employees and should understand the costs, in broad terms, of developing people. The organisation was also required to demonstrate that it evaluated its development of people at the individual, unit and institutional level within the context of business goals and targets. Following commitment to the standard, evaluation began to appear as a separate issue for discussion in committee papers.

Numerous papers offering guidance on undertaking evaluation and how to link it to unit and organisational objectives were debated and accepted by a variety of committees but

did not translate into concrete evaluation activity. In May 1995, it was reported to the liP Staff Development Committee that the liP assessor had observed gaps in evaluation activity which would have to be addressed if accreditation was to be achieved. In June, a 'Toolkit', was circulated throughout the organisation that explained the importance of evaluation and offered advice on putting appropriate systems in place. Yet, by November, the point at which the evaluation project we are concerned with was about to begin, the Staff Development Group minutes noted that *"the progress on evaluation has been slow or non-existent"*, and a mock liP assessment once again identified evaluation as a weakness. The explanations offered for this lack of activity identified the existence of significant barriers within the organisation which remained to be overcome:

- The perception that evaluation is viewed sequentially and, therefore, not considered until after the training and development plan is completed.
- People's perception that evaluation must be complex and time-consuming.
- The lack of managerial willingness/ability to implement evaluation good practice.
- The absence of a common approach and attitude to the longer-term evaluation of training delivered by internal providers.
- The absence of a fully integrated training, planning, delivery and evaluation system.

Comment: *This evaluation project took place within an organisation that, in the experience of its staff, was clearly not geared towards formal measurement or achievement of targets. There was little history of any evaluation more complex than 'happy sheets' taking place and the primary criteria for development or training being deemed a success was throughput, "burns on seats" (liP Project Team Member). Formal evaluation was not an activity which senior management were perceived to value and certainly, prior to liP, evaluation did not form part of the management agenda as reflected in committee papers. Even after commitment to liP had raised*

awareness amongst senior management, in so far as it was being discussed by the various committees, there was little sense of urgency and this increased importance did not percolate through to other levels of the organisation.

At committee level, some very significant and deep-rooted barriers to evaluation, at both individual and organisational levels, had been recognised but without any identification of ways in which they might be overcome other than an expectation that some of the anticipated outcomes of this evaluation project would help to break these barriers down. Yet the project itself would need to take place against the background of these obstacles and there did not appear to be any appreciation of how significant the effect of these were likely to be.

4.2.3 The Organisation and 'Fair Selection'

Since its inception the organisation had been associated with the concepts of 'open' and 'equal' in terms of treatment of staff and customers and, from the late eighties, had actively sought to be an institution which was

truly open to all sections of the community and in whose activities all individuals whether staff or students are encouraged to participate fully and equally (PVS Planning Division, 1995, p. 7)

The evaluation considered here was therefore seeking to assess a programme which reflected a particularly strong aspect of the culture of this organisation. Based originally on its commitment to offer opportunity to all, it had developed values and ideals about equality of opportunity that were actively supported by staff and were reflected internally through the development of Equal Opportunities policies and the senior management desire to mainstream. Equality of opportunity was, and is, widely espoused and promoted by the organisation and would generally be perceived, both internally and externally, as a characteristic of this organisation.

As part of the mainstreaming activity, the Equal Opportunities Action Plan of 1990 stated the organisation's commitment to all staff involved in selection panels having attended a 'Fair Selection' training course by the end of 1995. In keeping with the approach to evaluation already noted the statement did not include any mention of competencies to be achieved or any measurements of success to be applied other than that all relevant staff should have received the training. However, the informal evaluation made by many people was that the 'Fair Selection' initiative was unnecessary. Results from staff surveys regularly demonstrated the widely-held perception that the organisation did not discriminate on the grounds of gender, race or disability and that there was a strong and recognised set of organisational core values relating to equal opportunities, *"equal opportunities permeates everything"* (Recruiters' Focus Group), *"EO awareness is very much part of the organisation's culture"* (staff member). This was reflected in the focus group for recruiters, held as part of the evaluation project, where it was felt that 'Fair Selection' was *"something we've been doing for twenty years anyway"* and *"we don't go in for that sort of thing, even without the training"*. Throughout the programme, there had been resistance to the 'Fair Selection' training from people *"who felt that they had done this all their lives"* (Director, Equal Opportunities Unit).

In fact, the organisation had not been systematically monitoring its staff profile and the reality did not necessarily suggest that the organisation had been as successful as these informal assessments had concluded. The Director of the Equal Opportunities Unit was clearly aware of shortfalls in achievement:

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it's proving difficult in many areas, it's proving difficult in areas where that requires quite radical change, for example in the area of staffing, actually changing the profile of the staff which is in both Plans For Change and the Equal Opportunities Plan. It is, I think, the wording is to work towards a staff profile which more nearly reflects the populations we seek to serve, and that is proving extremely difficult. ... PVS has a culture which in terms of how it recruits people relies very much, despite our Fair Selection processes, on word of mouth, on networking, on whether you see yourself as working for PVS.

Comment: *The initiative itself reflected a strong element of the organisation's culture, a deeply-held belief that the organisation both represented and practised 'open and equal;' something which was inherently 'good'. Therefore, its value was self-evident and did not need to be demonstrated. In the context of recruitment, the conclusion reached through informal evaluation was that "it works," (member of the Recruiters Focus Group). Most managers and recruiters had been part of the organisation for a considerable period, and as such, shared the cultural values of the organisation, values that were not conducive to questioning levels of success in this area, "on 'Fair Selection' it is a brave person who challenges a senior member of staff," (liP Project Director). However, as the quotation from the Director of the Equal Opportunities Unit demonstrates, the reality was that concrete evidence to support this belief did not exist. When I questioned individuals about their own experience, during one-to-one interviews, the reality was that no one could cite individual members of staff who were known to have disabilities and few could cite staff that were from ethnic minority groups.*

4.3 The Evaluation Project

The evaluation project itself ran from December 1995 to March 1996 and a summary of the main activities can be found in Table 4.1 which sets the project in the context of other relevant events within the organisation.

Table 4. 1 Chronology of PVS Project

	Evaluation Of 'Fair Selection'	Organisation	liP
1995 Sept/Oct	Approximately 2000 staff trained Invitations to tender for the evaluation of the appraisal initiative issued		
1995 Nov	Tenders assessed by liP Project Team, short-listed candidates make presentations and the successful consultants chosen Decision made that 'Fair Selection' should be the subject of evaluation by the consultants	Staff Development Group notes that there had been little progress on evaluation since the circulation of the liP Toolkit Decision made to focus on 'Fair Selection'	Mock liP assessment identified shortfalls against evaluation criteria
1995 Dec	Meeting between PVS team and consultants at which revised brief, reduced fees and division of responsibility discussed	Director, Equal Opportunities Unit's secondment about to end and future of the Unit is uncertain Next stage of equal opportunities policy implementation being planned	
1996 Jan	liP Project Director absent and deputy ill – causes delays in appointment of desk work consultant and in progressing work with the consultancy team Middle of month - consultant identified to undertake desk research Meeting with consultants and deadline of early February agreed for draft report based on desk research and pilot evaluation. Format of focus groups agreed, participation to be based on those involved in recent recruitment.		
1996 Feb	Invitations to focus groups issued under cover of letter from Senior Manager Quality Assurance Two focus groups take place – sessions opened by liP Project Director and then facilitated by consultant Report of desk research completed and the preliminary evaluation report produced	Staff Development Committee accept report	Deadline for portfolio is end of Feb
1996 Mar	Meeting between liP Project Team and consultants to agree plan for continuing work on evaluation over the next six months	Staff informed of failure to meet liP standard	liP assessment takes place and failure to meet standard notified

4.3.1 The Process

Although the decision to appoint consultants was made in July 1995, the reality was that invitations to tender were not issued until the September. In November (four months before the liP deadline), the tenders were assessed, the short-listed candidates made a presentation and a set of consultants were chosen. In December, the first meeting between the consultants and the PVS team took place at which revisions to the project brief, division of responsibilities and the available funding were outlined by PVS. This included the change of focus from the appraisal system to 'Fair Selection' and the appointment of an additional 'consultant' by PVS to undertake desk-based research.

This work was to be undertaken in collaboration with the Training and Development section and to be based on the existing data available within the organisation. Due to illness, the absence of the liP Project Director, and the need for the remaining members of the liP team to undertake other work, it was not until mid-January 1996 that an individual was appointed from the Personnel 'temp register' to undertake the deskwork research over a two-week period.

Decisions about the approach to evaluation were largely determined by circumstances. The evaluation took place after years of implementation during which the only evaluation undertaken had been at the immediate reaction level (trainees completing end of course questionnaires). The original absence of any intent or requirement to assess the impact of the initiative meant that information had not been collected about whether knowledge and skills had been absorbed, *"Fair Selection' has gone on for five years and no-one's checked that any learning has gone on,"* (Desk Work

Researcher). Any data relating to attendance or satisfaction that did exist were difficult to access as systems were not at this point computerised. Nor was cost data held in any readily accessible way which would have allowed the calculation of the training cost per individual. *"They haven't actually got the data to do this evaluation ...it's only really any use for saying that they need to do something with their data collection,"* (Desk Work Researcher). Thus, both PVS and the consultants agreed that the limitations of the quantitative data needed to be augmented with qualitative work.

By February we need something which purports to be some sort of qualitative work, need to talk to people about how it was for them, maybe focus groups, the portfolio need to show a genuine attempt to talk to some recruiters. (liP Project Team Member).

At the end of January 1996, it was agreed with the consultants that the deskwork report would be completed by the beginning of February (including indication of data covered/not available). The consultants were to collect further, qualitative, data using focus groups, membership of which was based on participation in a recent recruitment campaign. In early February 1996, invitations to attend focus groups were sent out under cover of a letter written by the Senior Manager responsible for Quality Assurance, expressing the intent to evaluate the impact of training and development on 'Fair Selection' and the intention to use the recent recruitment scheme as an example of this. Two focus groups took place in mid-February; an recruiters focus group and a recruitees focus group. Twelve recruiters were invited of whom five attended; thirty-six recent recruits were invited, of whom nine attended. Each of the focus groups opened with an introduction from the liP Project Director, who then left the consultant to run the group and collect the data.

Based on the findings from the desk-research and the focus groups, the consultants produced a report which was presented to the Staff Development Committee in which they demonstrated the application of their model in the pilot evaluation ('Fair Selection') and

made proposals for changes that should be made in the Personnel Department's record-keeping to aid future evaluation. The committee broadly agreed the principles of the model and endorsed the consultants' proposals for moving forward. This formed the basis of the submission for the liP portfolio. In March 1996, the liP assessment took place in parallel with the discussions being held between the liP Project team and the consultants about development of evaluation within the organisation. On 22nd of March it was announced that the organisation had failed to meet the liP Standard because the assessor had found

real weakness in consistency of practice, in the operation of systems on the ground and inconsistency of management support for Training and Development. In their view, a complex organisation like PVS needs more time to embed key processes such as appraisal and evaluation. (Deputy Chief Executive, PVS, Internal Memorandum to all staff, 23.4.96)

4.3.2 The Purpose

Defining the purpose of this evaluation project was complex in that it had three publicised objectives which, although related, were different and not necessarily wholly compatible. Although success criteria had not been identified for the initiative at its conception, the Director of the Equal Opportunities Unit had clearly identified outcomes for the evaluation of 'Fair Selection' that would be useful.

Who is being recruited, under what circumstances? Who's applied and who is being appointed? Apart from that kind of monitoring, it would be very useful to have qualitative feedback on how people who have experienced the training feel about their competence to do the job - do they think they're making decisions differently? . Do they think their skills are enhanced in that area? And has it enhanced them? What have been the costs and benefits for them in terms of their area of work?

It would be a valuable outcome, I think, if we did have monitoring procedures that were not too demanding and costly in terms of the resource that you'd have to put in to get them, but that would give us ongoing quality assurance information and equality information and also enable us to feed it into ongoing staff development. ... If we move into more politically sensitive areas like trying to drive to recruit more minority ethnic people, we need to draw on research, on evaluation, on monitoring, so I guess the information, I'd hope, would feed into some more development.

However, a memo written in December 1995 to the Heads of Personnel and Training by the liP Project Director outlined two other purposes. The first, a short-term aim of

providing evidence of evaluation for the liP portfolio by the beginning of March 1996, the memo describing the project as “*an important plank in meeting the evaluation indicators in the liP standard*”, and the second, a longer term aim of producing a “*robust model that can be used to evaluate changes*”. Beneath this apparent clarity of purpose, however, there was less certainty; privately the liP Project Director believed that “*we won’t be clear about the scope until we get into it*” and an liP Project Team Member noted the need for “*an overall approach, philosophy, model*”. Yet there seemed little additional clarity by February 1996 when the Desk Work Researcher observed

they don't seriously seem to know whether they want to do this or not. They don't know whether they want to do it for real or just to get into the liP portfolio. I think it's a rush job for liP. I don't know how interested in it they really are or if they just want something for the portfolio.

Comment: *The Director of the Equal Opportunities Unit, the supposed sponsor of the evaluation project, had identified desirable outcomes from the evaluation that would assess the impact of the programme (what Easterby-Smith (1994) terms ‘proving’) and would move the issue of ‘Fair Selection’ and equality of opportunity forward (in Easterby-Smith’s (1994) terms improving). However, the reality was that the assessment of the impact of the ‘Fair Selection’ initiative was the least important objective. This had been a late second choice anyway, as the intention*

had been to evaluate the appraisal initiative but at the last moment it was judged to be too sensitive and the Director of the Equal Opportunities Unit played little active part in the evaluation itself. The evaluation project was managed, and driven, by the liP team who saw it predominantly as a means of meeting the requirements of the liP standard, this, for them was “the only real deadline,” (liP Project Director). The objectives identified by the liP Project Director did not specifically relate to the

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initiative at all. 'Fair Selection' was a vehicle for testing an evaluation model and demonstrating the organisation's commitment to evaluation in order to satisfy the liP requirements, akin to Nevo's (1986) public relations purpose, allied to a broader aim of improving evaluation practice within the organisation underpinned by an aspiration to change attitude and behaviours (learning).

An important aspect of the liP team's role was to 'champion' liP within the organisation, albeit in a low-key way, and it is therefore unsurprising that the liP Project Director should publicly appear definite and positive about the intended outcomes of the evaluation. However beneath the rather general aims stated by the liP Project Director's memo there was little clarity about what would be done or how and from the beginning this impacted on timescales. "It took a hellish long time to decide" (liP Project Team Member), not least because of the considerable discussion necessary to arrive at a consensus view. While the existence of pre-defined goals, other than throughput, for this initiative might have provided some degree of focus for the evaluation of the initiative, the emphasis on liP meant that, in themselves, they would not been sufficient to meet all the needs that this evaluation was required to fulfil.

Privately, the Project Director perceived evaluation as "perverse, interesting and difficult" and something that, at the beginning of the project, she knew little about.

I don't think that managers are encouraged to think in evaluative terms and I think little of the literature suggests any kind of systematic approach. ... I mean, I've worked in a number of soft change areas and I think it's particularly hard to pin down evaluation techniques that are useful for those areas.

This was not helpful in terms of the organisation's ability (as represented by the Project Director) to clarify the scope and nature of the project other than in general

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terms. This was compounded by the evaluation taking place at a time when

a lot of things are happening, therefore I can't devote specific attention to it, and whenever I take my foot off the pedal, things slow down. I just feel as though what I've done is occasionally turned my view on to it, given it quite a lot of attention at that time and then moved sharply off, and I would actually like somebody to be moving it along much of the time. (liP Project Director, January 1996)

At a time of significant pressure for the liP Project Team the absence of a clear focus and the limited understanding of the extent of the work that would be necessary led to unrealistic aspirations and timescales as team members recognised in retrospect. "It was barmy to try and do this in a one month window." (liP Project Team Member). "The original idea that this could be a short sharp project seems ridiculous now," (liP Project Director).

Once more, an environment had been created where evaluation was to occur

in a climate where everyone was rushing on to the next thing. They are always rushing on to something else and its questionable whether we ever sit down and really think things through properly." (Director, Equal Opportunities Unit).

4.3.3 The Role of Evaluator

The decision taken by the Staff Development Group, based on papers from the liP Project Team, to commission external consultants to undertake the evaluation was based on two primary lines of argument. Firstly, the recognition that a number of other initiatives were underway at this time and the need to introduce appropriate evaluation practices would have to compete with these other initiatives for time and resources; secondly, that the necessary expertise was not available in-house. The belief within the liP team was that its members possessed neither the time nor the necessary skills and it would take too long to identify others within the organisation who combined the expertise, interest and availability. In addition, the liP Project Director hoped that the consultants would support

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and facilitate development within the organisation and would provide "*a perspective on what's happened elsewhere*". However, everyone did not necessarily view this as an entirely positive contribution.

I think its better to work through our own solutions. It's easier to look at what other people are doing and not have the discussions we need to have, to face our own problems." (liP Project Team Member).

Comment: *The liP Project Director's personal lack of knowledge may have led to her belief that sufficient in-house expertise did not exist within her team or perhaps made it difficult for her to judge whether the extent of any knowledge was sufficient. However, the evidence of the various papers put before committees, which discuss the requirements of evaluation and possible approaches, does suggest that in-house expertise did exist within the team and, in retrospect, one team member felt*

at the time, people were feeling run ragged, aware of time pressures. We believed that we didn't have the skills to do it ourselves, but I'm sure we did. In hindsight, perhaps we convinced ourselves that we didn't have the skills. (liP Project Team Member).

The workload pressures, combined with the team leader's lack of knowledge and consequent uncertainty, made the input of external expertise particularly attractive and may have caused those with the appropriate skills to be reluctant to volunteer for the additional responsibility of the evaluation role. It is also possible that those who possessed some evaluation knowledge and skills lacked confidence in their ability. This may be because they shared the belief of the liP Project Director that evaluation was difficult, possibly on the basis that there was little empirical evidence of it having been done successfully within the organisation, and the expectation that 'experts' would bring more sophisticated skills and processes with them. In retrospect, the lack of time became the paramount justification as the liP Project Director maintained that

we could not have written that internally given the time available. I don't think we could have done full stop, but certainly we couldn't have done given the other things we were doing at the same time, (liP Project Director).

While others reflected more cynically that,

*we rushed to get something in the portfolio and it didn't do us any good.
We just threw money at things for liP. (liP Project Team Member)*

The accepted tender offered a team of three consultants (H, J & P) all of whom cited research and evaluation experience in public sector organisations. Their proposal centred around a generic nine-celled matrix model offering a '*framework for evaluation*' (Training and Development Project Proposal, 1995) which could be used to evaluate any development initiative and, thereby, apparently meeting one of the main aims of the evaluation. The consultants claimed that collection of data to complete the nine cells would enable evaluation at three levels: validation, cost effectiveness and cost benefit, thereby meeting the requirements of the liP standard.

The lack of clarity about the evaluation impacted on the role of the consultants from the first meeting which took place in December 1995 (the supposed sponsor, the Director of the Equal Opportunities Unit, did not attend). Rather than a discussion about implementation of the project as outlined by the accepted proposal, the liP Project Director explained that the aim of the meeting was to reach a shared understanding about revision to the approach, timescale and expected outcomes. It was only at this point that it was explained to the consultants that the appraisal system was viewed as too politically sensitive to evaluate and the 'Fair Selection' initiative was now the focus. They were also informed that the amount available for the project was considerably less than had been bid for in their tender, "*the question is how much of the grand plan is now possible?*" (liP Project Director).

Comment: *Prior to this meeting, the representatives of the organisation, and, in particular the liP Project Director, had been very sceptical about the proposed cost of project cited by the consultants but the liP Project Director confessed she had not raised the issue before because she thought the level of funding actually available might deter the consultants. The assumption appeared to be that once the consultants had been 'hooked' by having their tender accepted, they would be unwilling to back out completely, not least because the team quite cynically expressed the expectation that the consultants had hopes of further work with the organisation.*

They would like a large scale evaluation project going at PVS to pay their mortgages and further their academic careers. A large scale activity was what they wanted. (liP Project Director)

During this meeting, the revised roles of the consultants and of the organisation were explored, together with means of collecting data to meet the requirements of the consultants' model. It was clear that the consultants had expected to undertake all aspects of the project as outlined in their successful proposal; however, the limited funding available would not support this and the PVS team were keen to focus the consultants' efforts to "add value". The liP Project Director's view was clearly that the value of the consultants lay in being the source of expertise:

it's daft to use the consultants' expertise to delve around in files. The reason for inviting consultants in is to extend the approach, add an extra dimension, help shape the report rather than be the writers of it. ... We would like to follow-up the original principle that Consultant H takes the lead, PVS will do the donkeywork, and move ownership over to PVS.

The consultants were presented with a revised brief based, the liP Project Director explained, on the thinking inspired by their presentation, together with a number of unspecified, pragmatic considerations which had caused the liP team to take a different approach to the overall exercise than the one originally specified.

Comment: *An important consideration for the team, which was not shared with the consultants explicitly, was that they “didn’t want artsy-fartsy consultants doing things that people couldn’t get into.” (liP Project Director)*

From the perspective of the consultants, however, the initial lack of clarity about the project and the subsequent evolution of requirements meant

it's not clear how the organisation want to use us. (Consultant H)

We are trying to establish the scope of the project and the core consultant involvement. The liP Project Director seems to be saying that we haven't really got a fix on this. (Consultant J)

Their reaction to this prompted the liP Project Director to reflect after the meeting that

he (Consultant H) thought we were all over the place, that we had no idea what we wanted. ... I have concerns that H et al have a different agenda, because they seem unsure what our agenda is. This is partly due to our lack of ability to make clear what we want.

However, her view of this dialogue with the consultants, the external experts, was that it formed part of the anticipated support and development that the consultants were to provide; it was valid to hone the objectives in the light of the consultants' expertise.

I thought that there was a real tension about H trying to pin us down. It accorded partly with me wanting to have something in monosyllables, but it was also a developing activity, so how could we be precise when we didn't know ...people have other things to do and this is their first time of doing it. (liP Project Director)

Comment: *Their proposal having been accepted, the consultants had not expected the brief and the funding to have changed so quickly and significantly, and were cautious. My observation notes of the first meeting between the two sides following the award of the contract to the consultants record that the participants were “verbally dancing round each other”, “testing the territory” and describes the consultants as*

proceeding cautiously, keeping their distance, appear to be suspicious of what they were going to be asked to provide for the much reduced sum involved.

My attempts to pursue this issue in conversations with the consultants were unproductive as they refused to be drawn on this, despite assurances about confidentiality and impartiality. Although not part of the project team, my association with PVS affected my relationship with the consultants. Prior to the

beginning of the project the consultants had been informed by the liP Project Director that I would be present during the project, albeit in a detached way, and that I had some knowledge about evaluation. This clearly established my position as a member of staff and raised the possibility that I might be viewed as an internal expert by the project team. Inevitably, the consultants tended towards diplomacy and caution in their responses during our conversations. Despite this, it was clear that the consultants struggled with the apparent lack of organisational clarity about the project direction and scope, other than that it was to be smaller than they had been led to believe. Not surprisingly, when set against the PVS team's cynicism about the level of fees contained in the proposal and their expectation that the consultants would try to engineer additional work in the organisation, this created tension within the relationship.

A summary of the outcomes of the meeting provided by the consultants (letter dated 22nd December 1995), detailed their revised understanding of their primary roles. The consultants were to act as technical advisors, identifying data requirements, interpreting and applying data to the model and to liP, contributing to reports, contributing to steering groups. The liP Project Director was to be primary point of contact for the consultants.

They understood PVS' role as project leadership and management, data collection and

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analysis, interpretation and application of data to the model and to liP, drafting and production of reports, liaison and administrative support. PVS would also identify someone from the organisation's 'consultancy register' (in reality a list of people interested in short term contract work) to undertake the 'deskwork' (internal research gathering quantitative data on cost, throughput and impact) on 'Fair Selection'. However, the lack of clarity continued as one member of the liP team noted, "*we need to do more work on what we mean by desk work*" and the Desk Work Researcher, echoing Weiss (1990), found that

they weren't clear about what they really wanted, but I can't do it in the timescale. I keep getting new slants from them on what they want. ... The more I listened, the more I thought, hang on, I didn't realise you wanted to do that with it. A lot of the problems stem from the fact that they don't really know what they want. (Desk Work Researcher)

The individual appointed to undertake the deskwork perceived herself to be junior to the consulting team. She felt inexperienced and the lack of clear direction increased her sense of vulnerability.

I feel stressed, a bit dropped in the deep end. I'm very worried about being challenged on my assumptions and what I've done, if I'm critical then people won't like it. I have seldom felt so insecure about achieving a successful outcome in my life.

This was a source of real concern because "if I do a good job I might get other work in [PVS]".

Despite the liP Project Director's clear belief that the consultants were the experts, experience on the project led to the recognition that the consultants had limitations which had not been envisaged before.

One of the problems about using an external consultant to write a report for a committee is that, of course, they don't understand the politics of committees, so this is no critique of what Consultant H put in the report. I mean he put his consultant recommendations in there. You'll see that the cover sheet I put on was one that translated into language that PVS accepts. The cover sheet was an enabling device to get it into the mainstream of work.

This was reinforced by the concerns expressed by the Desk Work Researcher that

I don't know anyone and what the political implications are I don't understand the hierarchy, whose toes I'm stepping on. I'm sure that conflicts are going on that I'm sort of meandering over, and I wish I knew all about it.

Comment - It can, of course, be advantageous not to be involved in the politics; it may allow a course to be pursued by seemingly detached third parties which otherwise may require intricate political manoeuvres and consequent delays. However, this lack of contextual sensitivity may also be counter-productive if it raises tension or unintentionally exacerbates difficulties that already exist. In contrast to the difficulties identified by Legge's (1984) crisis of accreditation where the existence of an evaluator is sufficient to provide credibility, experience during the project led the liP Project Director to conclude

I suspect that, in future, that one of us should sit in and work with them, and I'm thinking of how we work here, of putting one of my team onto the evaluation project to give it a little bit more heft. (liP Project Director)

4.3.4 Attitudes towards the Evaluation

It's been a bloody struggle trying to get people on board, accepting it's important. (liP Project Team Member)

The absence of a culture of measurement and the lack of experience of evaluating initiatives was not an auspicious background against which to approach this evaluation project, and it was certainly not enthusiastically embraced by all concerned. Most people believed that equality of opportunity was being successfully delivered and some questioned the need for either the initiative or an evaluation.

We're nit picking - because we do more than any other organisation.

We're being a bit too critical of ourselves.

(Participants in Recruiters' Focus Group)

Consultant H reported to a meeting with the liP team that the “*recruiters did not see this as an important area*”, although this lack of enthusiasm for evaluation did not appear in the report.

***Comment:** The ‘recruiters’ involved in the focus group were all white males, of European origin, with no visible disability, (confirmed by subsequent conversations held with participants), the recruitees group was of mixed gender but, again, with no obvious disability or minority ethnic group representation. Discussions in both groups focused on disability and age with some consideration of gender in the recruitees group and no mention in either group of ethnicity, a point that only became apparent to the white, male, able-bodied consultant when I raised it in subsequent discussions. The assessment of ‘Fair Selection’ by these focus groups highlights how difficult it is for individuals to be objective in their informal assessments, particularly if these are not articulated, which must inevitably reflect and be a product of their own experiences, values and perceptions. ‘We hold many dubious beliefs ... because they seem to be the most sensible conclusions consistent with the available evidence.’ (Gilovich, 1991, p. 2)*

There were also those responsible for training and development who maintained that all training and development was inherently beneficial. All training served to broaden people’s awareness and exposure to new ideas, practices and technology and therefore, even if the stated aims were not achieved, the overall effect would still be valuable in the long term. They therefore perceived little value in formal evaluation. On this basis, the need for an evaluation process and the resources it would require lacked momentum, particularly in a climate where resources were perceived to be tight and workload pressures were increasing. Indeed concern about resources and workloads was a consistent underlying theme in the trainers’ response to the work on evaluation during the project, to the extent

that even those involved throughout the evaluation project reacted negatively to the recommendations contained in the consultants' report on the basis of its perceived resourcing implications.

Throughout the liP project, there had been tensions and political undercurrents relating to the running of training and development and the balance of power between the providers and the Staff Development Committee. This had manifested itself in an apparent lack of support for the work being done on evaluation.

The Head of Training and Development is very keen to protect her patch. She resists any suggestion that they may not be doing things as well as they can; they are too busy, they would do it in an ideal world. (liP Project Team Member)

The reaction of the training providers to the consultants' report at the committee stage was described by the liP Project Director as *"gosh, this all looks jolly difficult and we wouldn't possibly be able to manage all this"*. A negative response that had not been anticipated by the liP Team as representatives of the providers had been involved in the development of the evaluation approaches.

Comment: *while there was clear resistance to anything which was perceived to be increasing workloads at a time when everyone was under pressure, within Training there were additional sources of resistance. There was the issue of professional competence - "the attitude in training and development is hands off, we're*

professionals; we know what we are doing." (liP Project Team Member) - which led to some resistance towards being assessed by others not perceived as training professionals. A degree of defensiveness is also apparent in the 'ideal world' comment and the attempts to justify lack of evaluation activity on the basis that

"evaluation is a manager's job" (Trainer) which may stem from an uncomfortable

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recognition that, as training professionals, they should have accorded evaluation greater priority.

The resistance apparent amongst those involved in training and development reflected a wider reluctance towards undertaking evaluation that the liP Project Team had identified amongst managers in the organisation. The widely-held perception that evaluation was difficult and time-consuming which had been noted by the Staff Development Committee, and had been reflected in the liP Project Director's personal views, had to some extent become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In respect of liP, evaluation is a hard concept to grasp so most groups have gone down the list trying to tick things off, doing whatever is easy first so they have come to evaluation late. (liP Project Team Member)

This resulted in pressures on time which only compounded the difficulties. In addition, there were also negative expectations associated with the concept of evaluation, it was

perceived as personal criticism of what they've been doing and I've yet to see that being addressed head on. I mean, how can we evaluate what we've been doing while still retaining a sense of being a team, because some of the evaluation is bound to go back in and say, 'well, I think you were wrong there, or that was wrong there, or we should have done it better, but also I'm suggesting that you could have done it better', and I do think people are very resistant to go digging around - you know, what's past is past; we're here now, let's just go forward. (liP Project Director)

Thus the belief was that "evaluation opens up a can of worms for everybody." (liP Project Team Member) and, as such, may be better left undone.

Although there had been some recognition of the concerns of managers, there appears to have been little consideration of the possible relevance of the evaluation to others within the organisation, despite both the liP Project Director and the consultants identifying recruits, and staff in general, as stakeholders in 'Fair Selection'. The focus groups had been seen as a means of collecting data rather than a means of widening participation and the liP Project Director expressed surprise at

how interested the people who took part in the focus groups were in what was being done. That's actually quite impressive.

There was a sense among those who participated that there should be an exchange, they had made a contribution to the process and a sense of equity required something to be given in return.

It's important that I get some feedback from being involved in this process because my time is in demand. I want to see the evaluation report; I want to see if my experience is different from other people. (Member of Recruits' Focus Group)

Recruits involved in the focus groups believed that *"it is important to evaluate"*. Prior to the focus group, they had been unaware that evaluation activity was taking place and it would have been useful

to know that evaluation was going on before. If you really want feedback its good to at least flag it up. (Member of Recruits' Focus Group)

Some felt that they could have made a greater contribution if they had been assessing the process as it was happening rather than in retrospect.

Reservations were expressed, however, about the intentions of the organisation. When I conducted follow-up interviews with members of the recruits' focus group, there were doubts about the process that had occurred. Having expressed the view that evaluation was important *"if you are going to use it and you're not just doing it for form's sake"* the suspicion held by some was that the focus group was simply a means of collecting information to support a predetermined agenda.

The consultant didn't hear anything he didn't want to hear.

I felt the focus group was a waste of time because what I wanted to say wasn't being heard.

I don't feel unjust in saying that they only heard what they wanted to hear. They never hear anything negative; they always hear the positive things.

Nor did they expect the findings to be widely shared although there was a strong feeling that *"as part of equal and open, its got to be open"*.

Comment: My observation during the recruits focus group was that the questions and prompts used by the consultant were phrased in a way that proactively sought a positive response, for example, "I assume none of you experienced questions that weren't relevant?" No attempt was made to draw out those who did not contribute. Given the limitations of the relationship, as noted earlier, between the consultants and me, it was difficult to precisely determine why this apparent manipulation of the focus group occurred. It may have resulted from a lack of expertise on the part of the consultant in terms of either facilitation skills or understanding of relevant issues (see earlier comments re. ethnicity) or, as suspected by the participants mentioned above, there may have been a deliberate intention to collect 'useful' supportive information for the liP portfolio. Within the consultants' report, the focus groups are described as

having usefully added to the evaluation information gathered and to support the findings of the 'desk work' that 'Fair Selection' training is generally effective in supporting the achievement of the organisation's equal opportunity goals.

The literature does identify as a problem the deliberate manipulation of the evaluator and the evaluation by sponsors to ensure that the desired findings are produced. While I did not find evidence of any deliberate attempt by PVS to influence the findings of this evaluation the consultants were clearly sensitive to the agenda of the sponsor and the Desk Work Researcher did comment "there's a feeling that they want to put everything in a good light". The consultants were fully aware of the importance to the sponsor of meeting the liP requirements and recognised the significance of the organisational commitment to equality of opportunity. Given that they are unlikely to wish to antagonise their sponsor, the consultants actions must

have been influenced, however unintentionally, by this knowledge.

4.3.5 Outcomes

If the formal outcomes of the project as stated in the original brief are used as a measure, the evaluation project might be judged a success; a nine-cell matrix model, information for the liP portfolio, the consultants' report on 'Fair Selection' were all produced and recommendations for improvement and development were agreed by the relevant committee. However, the reality was that little had changed in respect of evaluation and the organisation had failed to gain liP accreditation.

The evaluation report included some positive statements about equal opportunities and 'Fair Selection' within the organisation but largely based on inference rather than firm data. Overall, the report concluded that *'there is no direct evidence that the 'Fair Selection' good practices are being applied systematically and carefully'* (Investors In People, Training and Development Evaluation Project, Consultants' Interim Report, Feb 1996, p.13) and made a number of recommendations to improve monitoring and data collection for the purpose of evaluation. It did, however, report that the limited application of the nine-celled matrix suggested that *'it offers a robust way of structuring the potentially confusing process of evaluating human resource development interventions'* (Investors In People, Training and Development Evaluation Project, Consultants Interim Report, Feb 1996, p. 16) and made recommendations for its development.

As the evaluation project progressed the liP Team had recognised that the evaluation of 'Fair Selection' would have to be more in the nature of a demonstration of longer term intent for the liP assessor.

Increasingly, there's a feeling that what we can put in the portfolio will look contrived and that a recognition that we need to improve and a statement of intent would be better. (liP Project Team Member)

The failure to achieve liP status was described as *"a fair cop"* by the liP Project Director but she felt that the *"assessment bought the evaluation although we know its freshly painted"*. The assessors' report did suggest that what had been *"bought"* was perhaps the intent rather than the implementation. The shortcomings they identified were those that the organisation was already aware of and which were unlikely to be addressed in the short term by this evaluation project.

During the evaluation process, the liP Project Director had observed that *"the key issue is what we are learning as an institution from this"* and, despite the failure to achieve accreditation, the liP Project Director had identified a number of positive outcomes from the experience:

We now have an enabling structure - a conceptual model tested, supportive people in place, an increasing awareness of the need to build activity on evaluation in at the start of the process, more general awareness across the organisation of the need for and benefits of evaluation. Some of the providers are doing things differently, not just happy sheets, but asking for evaluation of effectiveness.

However, others did not share the certainty that it was *"robust as a model"*. The observation of one liP Project Team member was that the model was

presented to the providers' group and everyone was very polite, and then left the meeting and said, 'What the hell was all that about?' (liP Project Team Member)

The liP Project Director was quickly forced to recognise that

one of the questions we've got ahead of us on our matrix here is whether it is too complex to be useful ...'cos I think it took the team time to get their heads around it and I don't think the Staff Development Committee fully got its head around it so it may be that we need to present it in a rather different way.

In terms of changing attitudes towards evaluation and encouraging managers to implement good practice, the liP Project Director had expressed the belief that

working through evaluation programmes brought it home to a wider range of people that evaluation should be in at the beginning.

Yet, her perception at the end of the project suggested that, in reality, little had changed amongst managers.

Unless I make an effort before my time in this place is done, I don't think any of my line managers will be saying, 'Well, I'd like your evaluation report on how this has gone', so it's, you know, if you like, if you aren't being pressed by something in the hierarchy.

Six months after the project, the Head of Training and Development felt that there was still little in the organisation's structure or practice that required people to evaluate.

If your line manager isn't interested in it, it's not going to be in your objectives, and if there's nothing formal about it ...

In terms of a wider sharing of the findings in response to my question, the liP Project Director admitted that, other than the need to report to the relevant committees in order to secure support, little thought had been given to how, if at all, the results and experiences were to be shared.

It's not been thought through how we will communicate the results of the evaluation project to whom or how. (liP Project Team Member)

Another member of the team noted that "*communication is all upwards*". After the project had been completed, the liP Project Director admitted that

I still don't know how to do it at the moment, because I'm sure it's not in the least appropriate to feed this back.

In addition, she had particular concerns about sharing the model as

people's backgrounds are important; people don't have the knowledge or skills to talk about things in a reasonable way.

Ultimately the model was not successfully presented within the organisation and it was not adopted for use due to its complexity because, as the new Head of Training and Development (former liP Project Team Member) explained,

people haven't really got the model in their heads; it's not workable; it's unwieldy, cumbersome and unworkable.

If, as Patton (1997) suggests, the true measurement of a good evaluation lies in its utilisation then this evaluation failed on all counts; little was learnt about the impact of the 'Fair Selection' initiative, the model was not adopted as a framework for evaluation within the organisation and attitudes towards evaluation did not appear to have changed.

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4.4 *The Learning and Implications for the Next Case*

Evidence of barriers to evaluation which accorded with those identified by the literature were found within the case study; there were obstacles relating to purpose, addiction to grand strategy, managerial dominance and utilisation. Three additional areas were identified which were not apparent in the literature but which created barriers during this evaluation; these related to the context, informal evaluation and negative expectations and were included as areas for exploration during the remaining case studies. Barriers relating to accreditation, verification and the difficulties of identifying the impact of HR did not arise, although other issues of interest emerged in the context of these areas. Table 4.2 provides a visual comparison of the findings from the literature and the case. The key points are then summarised in more detail in the sections that follow.

Table 4. 2 Barriers Identified In The Case Study

	Case 1 PVS
Barriers Which Were Predicted By The Literature	
Absence of clear purpose	X
Addiction of managers to grand strategy	X
Technical	X
Dominance of one stake-holder group (management)	X
Hidden Agendas	
Evaluation perceived as backward looking	
Linear approach to change	X
Disagreements about methodology (crisis of verification)	
Lack of evaluation expertise	
Crisis of accreditation	
Findings challenge assumptions of dominant stakeholders	
Factors Which Created Barriers That Had Not Been Identified By The Literature	
Informal, personal evaluations	X
Absence of Senior Management requirement for evaluation	X
Assumption that initiative had inherent benefits	X
Organisational culture	X
Negative expectations resulting from use of previous evaluation findings (blame culture)	X
Use of external consultants	X
Evaluator bias	

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4.4.1 Confirmation of Barriers Identified in the Literature

4.4.1.1 Strategy

The addiction of the senior management in this organisation to grand strategy (Tichy, 1983) explains the failure to consider evaluation at the beginning of the initiative and the absence of specific measurable objectives in the original initiative as deemed essential by Silverzweig and Allen (1976). This meant that there had been no incentive or requirement to collect data as the initiative progressed which severely limited the ability of the project to assess its impact as the necessary data did not exist and could not be collected retrospectively.

4.4.1.2 Purpose

The uncertainties and poor focus that resulted from the lack of clarity about the goals of this evaluation support Easterby-Smith's (1994) argument for the importance of identifying an explicit purpose for an evaluation. It had three 'public' purposes but the reality was that, as Patton (1997) suggests is inevitable, one purpose became dominant and, in this case, the reality was that the needs of the liP Project team to meet the requirements of the Portfolio became the primary driver. The lack of clarity about purpose stemmed not only from the multiplicity of publicly-stated purposes and the absence of clear objectives in the original initiative but also the pressures on the liP Project Team created by tight timescales and other demands which effectively prevented a consistent focus on the evaluation. Lack of experience and time for reflection produced stakeholders who were unclear about their intentions and their informational needs (Argyris, 1986; Weiss, 1990) which, in turn, created difficulties in giving direction to those collecting and interpreting the data.

4.4.1.3 *Linearity*

The difficulties described above were exacerbated by the linear approach adopted towards both the initiative and the evaluation process itself. This resulted in evaluation being addressed at the end of the liP process when the necessary historical data had not been collected and little time remained to actually undertake the evaluation process.

4.4.1.4 *Managerial Focus*

This evaluation was clearly dominated by the requirements of management needs (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; House, 1983) to respond to the liP requirements, with little thought being given to either its relevance or interest for others within the organisation, until prompted by the researcher and the interest demonstrated within the focus group.

Although overt attempts to manipulate the findings were not observed it would appear that knowledge of the sponsor's need to fulfil the requirements of the liP standard did influence activities and the reporting of findings.

4.4.1.5 *Utilisation*

Although not a barrier to the process of evaluation itself, the uses made of evaluation outcomes determine how effective the evaluation is in real terms. The limitations of the data available in this evaluation, combined with pressure of time and lack of clear purpose, resulted in an evaluation that was unintentionally poorly done (Alkin, 1990) and did not serve the purposes for which it had been intended.

4.4.2 *Additional Barriers Identified in This Case*

Additional barriers emerged from the case that had not been identified by the literature and these were used to inform the research for the next case study.

4.4.2.1 *Context*

Torres *et al.* (1996) note the influence of an organisations context and culture in the perception and use of evaluation findings but in this organisation the contextual background to the initiative and the evaluation emerged as significant at earlier stages of the evaluation. The culture in this case was neither target- nor measurement-oriented, and there was little evidence to suggest that similar initiatives had been evaluated in the past. Formal evaluation of this type was not something perceived to be valued or deemed important by the organisation and there was therefore little incentive to expend time and resources on it. The initiative itself reflected a dominant cultural characteristic that was a source of pride to members of the organisation.

4.4.2.2 *Informal Evaluation*

The result of this contextual background was an absence of any recognised need to evaluate the initiative which was compounded by informal (and questionable) evaluations of success that rendered both the initiative and a formal evaluation superfluous. It required an external trigger (liP) to prompt senior management's interest in evaluation, but this was neither sustained nor communicated.

4.4.2.3 *Negative Expectations*

The perception that evaluation was something that would be both unwelcome and complicated to do did reflect the technical difficulties identified in the literature (Tichy, 1983). However concerns were not simply about the mechanics of measurement; evaluation was seen as an inherently negative activity which would be divisive, inevitably lead to an apportioning of blame and error which would, in turn, result in personal criticism. Those who were not managers did not expect to have access to the findings and had suspicions about pre-determined outcomes and bias within the

process. On a personal level therefore there were a number of perceptions held by managers and non-managers which acted as positive incentives for non-participation in evaluation.

4.4.3 Barriers Identified by the Literature Which Were Not Present

4.4.3.1 Verification

While the lack of clarity about intent and direction impacted on the evaluator’s role significant differences about methodology were not a problem in this project, partly due to the limited nature of the data available. External to both the project and the organisation, the consultants were guided by the Project Team and, rather than acting in the capacity of independent evaluator, the primary emphasis was on meeting the requirements of those commissioning the projects. As this was reflected in the consultant’s approach to the activities and the reports produced, conflict about methodology did not arise.

4.4.3.2 Accreditation

Although the belief was that consultants would bring additional expertise, there was no expectation that they would give credibility to the evaluation through their existence as evaluators. On the contrary, experience of the project led to the conclusion that the presence of an liP Project Team Member was necessary to increase the credibility of the consultants and the project with staff.

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Chapter 5 Case Study Two – ABC

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the second case study which is set in ABC, an Executive Agency which, having established customer service, caring for staff, bias for action, and value for money as the organisation's key values, embarked upon a series of initiatives designed to *encourage the desired changes in behaviour and attitudes*. This involved a number of structural and attitudinal initiatives being introduced which were perceived to be compatible with both the core values espoused and the original aims and aspirations associated with the establishment of Executive Agencies.

The subject of this study is the evaluation of one such initiative, the empowerment of staff throughout the organisation. The project, which forms the basis for this case study, was a means of assessing the value of empowerment to this organisation at a point when political emphasis had changed and the Chief Executive (CE) who had personally championed empowerment was no longer part of the organisation. At this point, the future of empowerment within the organisation was unclear and uncertain.

5.2 Context

5.2.1 The Organisation

ABC was one of a number of ex-Civil Service Departments to be given Agency status under the Next Steps programme in 1991. At the time of the research, ABC had around 65,000 staff based in a national network of offices that provided a variety of informational

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and support services to their client groups. A CE and a management team of six Directors, who were ultimately responsible to the relevant Secretary of State, led the Agency.

5.2.2 The Organisation and Evaluation

A key aspect of becoming an Agency was the move towards performance targets and a culture of measuring, and rewarding, achievement linked to the business vision. Annual performance targets were agreed with the Secretary of State by the Chief Executive (CE) and cascaded through the hierarchy, at each stage translated into the relevant measures of performance for particular units.

Prior to Agency status, ABC had been a clearly defined, rigid hierarchy managed on a command and control basis and, in common with many government departments, was perceived internally and externally as bureaucratic and slow to react. A CE was appointed, who had not been part of the previous culture, the expectation being that he would instigate change that would 'turn it into a model of commercial efficiency', (Clarke, 1994, p .21). Ministerial expectations that accompanied Agency status, plus the threats posed by market testing and, latterly, the possibilities of contracting out work undertaken by the organisation, encouraged a move away from the perceived inefficiency of centralised and systems bound decision-making. In the CE's view, the formation of Agencies 'laid the foundation for a clearer customer focus in our work' (Bichard, 1994, p. 262), facilitation of which required changes in structure to allow responsibilities to be carried out at the appropriate level, a culture of core values and the establishment of a clear identity. As part of this, the CE in post at that time recognised the need to monitor change in terms of achievement rather than intentions and to create monitoring systems which would provide

data to show the extent (if any) to which the achievement of change is impacting the achievement of other targets and for any conflict for scarce resources to be resolved at the lowest level possible. (Bichard, 1994, p. 273)

In addition, assessments were being made outside the Agency about the impact of various initiatives, not least the success of Agency status itself. Thus the need to assess and report on performance was apparently very visible within this organisation from senior management level down to front line staff.

Targets are more prominent now, its league tables ...staff also say we only seem to talk about targets. (District Manager)

The emphasis on targets reflected the focus within the organisation on quantitative measurement of outputs.

The Agency criteria are visible numbers and targets met within budgets. (Area Director)

The only formal criteria, and that accepted by ABC, is outputs in terms of meeting targets within budgets. (Area Director)

Areas that did not lend themselves to such measures presented more of a problem as

there are no established measuring devices for the less tangible criteria. (Area Director)

The result being that "we don't tend to evaluate 'touchy-feely" (Area Director).

Comment: *Without exception, everyone interviewed was aware of quantitative targets relating to the work that they were responsible for, how they were set and how they were measured. The discomfort that existed within the organisation in relation to the measurement of 'softer' issues was also reflected in discussions about the research methods to be used during the evaluation (discussed in section 6.3.1). In Tichy's (1983) terms people were uncertain about the technical aspects, how to*

measure success in these areas and how that might be related to organisational strategy.

5.2.3 The Organisation and Empowerment

Once Agency status had been achieved a programme was instituted to deliver the desired changes and included initiatives which aspired to create behavioural and attitudinal change such as devolved rather than centralised budgets, removal of regional tiers of management, the local generation of strategic and business plans and the introduction of various Quality programmes including a Quality Framework and Chartermark. The ultimate aim was to

upturn the perceived 'top down' management style replacing it with a supportive enabling culture which will improve the service to the customer both internally and externally. This inversion of the hierarchical "pyramid" should result in allowing greater ownership of responsibility and involvement in decision-making at junior levels and do much to foster and improve corporate and public image. (Green and Faure, 1992, p .10)

Eight key areas for improvement were identified, one of which was the empowering of local management through maximum devolution of responsibility.

Giving staff and colleagues more space to use their initiative, to take decisions so they can respond more quickly to client need, innovate. (CE)

Initially the introduction of the initiative was relatively unstructured.

There was no explanation, we were all sitting around thinking what is empowerment ...it just dawned on me one day what they meant by this, I don't think anyone actually taught it. (Junior Manager)

It did not form the subject of procedural papers, the normal form of guidance for the organisation.

There wasn't an empowerment strategy, nothing was written down ...I can't remember a point at which anything was written down in a document specifically about we are having an empowerment process programme. It was an evolving process that was generated largely from C N, [the CE] there was no Board decision about, you know, we're now seeking to be an empowered organisation and people weren't written to or anything. (NI, Senior Management Development Consultant)

This in itself caused difficulties within the context of this organisation.

Because of their background many people couldn't handle the general vague introduction of the empowerment initiative. (CE)

In hindsight the individual who had been the CE responsible for the introduction of empowerment believed that a number of factors including the size of the organisation, the inherited blame culture and the *"instinctive dislike of empowerment in the Civil Service"* (CE) had resulted in slow progress.

Contrary to the advice given in the literature on the importance of agreed measurable objectives (for example, Silverzweig and Allan, 1976) the 'soft' initiative of empowerment also began with little in way of success criteria and only vague ideas of how its implementation might be assessed. *"We didn't have a framework of accountability"* (CE). The assumption or expectation was that its success or otherwise would be demonstrated through other measures such as improved quality of service, customer surveys, staff attitude surveys, *"if it was going wrong we would expect an increasing number of nasties."* (CE)

In this spirit, papers reflecting the work on the internal Award for Achievement in 1992 incorporate a number of features which reflect the empowerment initiative, for example the plan for the scheme to be based on self-assessment is stated to be reinforcing the

empowerment culture while the measurements of achievement include empowerment to the lowest practical level, and the effective involvement of staff in decision-making.

Comment: The absence of detail both in terms of the strategy and its assessment was a result of a number of factors. There was a genuine desire on the part of the CE that there should be the scope to empower people as appropriate within their own part of the business, a hope that people would use their initiative and try new things to improve the way that business was done. This initiative was also launched as a grand strategy (Tichy, 1983) rather than a systematic, incremental initiative with clear direction, a lack of specificity and clarity which would result in problems within the organisation that would necessitate the CE and the Board revisiting the concept of the initiative at a later stage to establish some boundaries.

Over time, various steps were taken to clarify both the nature of empowerment itself and the means by which it could be measured. The CE's foreword to the 1993/94 Business Plan included an implicit reference to empowerment when it stated the intention

to give our staff the maximum support in carrying out their work, devolving more authority to them and encouraging them to increase their skills. (ABC Business Plan 1993/1994, p.2)

The plan identified as a priority the need to

train and develop staff to have the knowledge, skills and confidence to make and be accountable for their own management decisions within a specific framework (ABC Business Plan 1993/1994, p. 13)

It also stated that

we will provide a clear and consistent message of what responsibility means in practice and the benefits this offers, making clear the parameters within which staff can work. Managers at all levels will be encouraged to take personal responsibility for making this happen. (ABC Business Plan 1993/1994, p. 20)

It had become clear that there was confusion about what was meant by empowerment and that some were using it as an excuse to abdicate responsibility. A wide variety of activities and processes were being introduced or altered in the name of empowerment and it became clear that some central messages were required to set “corner stones” (CE) in matters such as appraisal where consistency of approach was important to the organisation. There was also an increasing realisation at the top that there was a need to develop people’s skills and confidence in their ability to empower and be empowered.

Empowerment relies on a chain that leads from the chief executive right through senior managers, middle managers, line managers and customer service staff. If it is broken at any stage, the level of empowerment is radically reduced; if it is strengthened, the level of empowerment will increase (Terry and Hadland, 1995, p. 30).

Consistent with the new target-oriented culture some attempts were made to assess the level and impact of empowerment, but it was from the perspective of establishing training needs rather than the effect of empowerment on the organisation and its performance. An internal review was undertaken in 1993 that revealed that managers were not clear about how to deliver on empowerment and felt they needed development to perform well in the new culture. This prompted a further internal research project to assess the extent to which empowerment existed in the Agency, how it was being done, by whom and with what result, with the aim of using the findings to develop the ability of ABC senior managers to empower their staff. The research focused on those managers perceived by staff and external consultants as ‘empowering’ and sought to identify the characteristics of these managers and of the feeling of being empowered. The results identified three key features: understanding the concept, appropriate behaviour, and possession of skills allowing the concept to be practised.

This led to the development of Senior Management development workshops to provide training for senior managers across a range of competencies, including those perceived as crucial to empowering behaviour. In the view of the Senior Management Consultant (an internal ABC role), the Senior Managers' Development Programme was the nearest the organisation came to declaring its intention to be an empowering organisation. It was

marketed as a programme which was about developing Senior Managers to be more effective in an empowered organisation, so that in a sense that was the biggest trumpet that was blown about empowerment. (NI, Senior Management Development Consultant)

One outcome from the workshops was the request for a definition of empowerment which led to the production in 1995 of "*a think piece*," (Senior Management Development Consultant) which defined empowerment in the context of ABC and identified ways individuals could assess the extent of empowerment within their own office or team.

Entitled 'Empowerment in ABC'; this internal publication identified the importance of

empowerment of our people, which allows them to give their energy, ideas and commitment to improving our standard of service delivery alongside the achievement of value for money will be essential if we are to win the right to deliver the business ... In a large organisation such as ABC empowered people are essential if we are to respond successfully ... a flexible empowered workforce is likely to produce a flexible, accurate and timely response to turbulence and change. (Empowerment in ABC, 1995, p. 5)

Links were made between the organisation's four core values and empowerment, and individuals were encouraged to assess their line management and their part of the organisation against empowerment criteria (p. 15) such as '*upward feedback is sought and acted upon*', '*managers listen, support and encourage*', '*communication is open and keeps people well informed*'.

However the external environment in which ABC operated was changing. As a result of spending cuts announced in November 1995, the drive from the Department to which the

Agency was responsible, was to cut costs, as financial constraints were extremely tight. It was estimated that an annual 20% downsizing would be needed to keep within the public expenditure ceilings, and there was increasing ministerial interest in private sector involvement as a means of achieving this. The 1994/95 Annual Report reported that

the major cultural change which followed the Agency's policy to empower staff at all levels continued to have a positive effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of the Agency's operation during the year. (ABC Annual Report And Accounts, 1994/1995, p. 30)

However, it also reported that the Departmental review of the Agency in 1994 had concluded that although the first year's achievements have provided a sound base on which to build the Agency now needed to develop a comprehensive strategy to maximise its efficiency and that it needed to review its internal structure including the senior management team. Details of senior management changes were reported including the move of the current CE to another Agency in April 1995. Within ABC, 21 Areas were merged to form 13 with the inherent staffing complications and there was a requirement to reduce the estate by 30%.

***Comment:** This reflected the change in the political climate at Ministerial level with the emphasis moving from one of positively encouraging the clients to claim their entitlement to placing the onus of responsibility and understanding back with the clients. The need to reduce spending in this area became paramount. This Annual Report clearly signalled the new emphasis on cost efficiency. The foreword, written by the acting CE, focused on financial issues, particularly stressing the importance of the prevention of fraud. People at all levels within the organisation were aware of the change in emphasis that had taken place. Amongst those interviewed, the new CE was perceived as "having signed up to this" (Senior Manager) and as "not*

having the level of power that CN [previous CE] had" (Middle Manager)
because "the Department wanted someone who'd do what they
wanted"(Clerical Staff's Focus Group).

The focus of the 1995/96 Business Plan was very much on managing to deliver quantitative targets amid tight financial constraints, *"the Agency criteria are visible numbers and targets met within budgets"* (Area Director), and, although *'extending empowerment and accountability'* (ABC Business Plan, 1995/1996, p. 15) was identified as a key task, other than the stated intention to *'support managers by delegating personnel decision making to the lowest appropriate level'* (p. 24) there was little reference, implicitly or explicitly, to empowerment.

The Senior Managers' Development Programme, which had underpinned the moves toward empowerment, had been delivered to all senior managers in ABC (bar three) by June 1995. As a result of the review of the programme the senior management team identified a number of areas requiring action and invited a number of *'key players'* from across the Agency to participate in a workshop which would *'provide a clear steer on the way forward'* (Key Players Workshop - Participants Briefing Paper, 1995, p. 2). One of the areas requiring action identified by the senior management group was the measurement of empowerment. Participants were

invited to put forward ideas on how the measurement could be undertaken and also to suggest how the results might be used. (Key Participant Workshop - Briefing Paper, 1995, p. 6)

The subsequent workshop discussions identified uncertainty as to whether empowerment remained key to business direction, and whether it was still supported by the management team.

***Comment:** From the evidence collected during the interviews undertaken for the evaluation and this research, there appeared to have been no doubts about the importance of empowerment while the previous CE was in post. One of the most significant aspects of change at the most senior levels in terms of priorities and emphasis was in the lead that it was perceived to give to the tiers of management below. In an essentially hierarchical and bureaucratic culture where success and promotion are dependent on approval from line management, it is unsurprising that there should be a large number of managers and staff whose priorities and support*

move around depending on which way the wind is blowing and how cold or warm it is, like what the pressures and influences are, and our research shows that a lot of our senior managers fall into that category, that they look for a lead from the top and so things like enthusiasm for empowerment can evaporate quickly if the lead from the top is those are not the issues you should be looking at or even those are not the issues we're looking at, we're not into that, we're into this. (NI, ABC Senior Management Development Consultant)

The impression at senior management level, and below, was that the new CE was "less experienced in political flack," (Senior Manager) than the outgoing CE and therefore was "more likely to do a reflex reaction," (Middle Manager). In other words "if something goes wrong you pull it up a couple of levels," (Junior Manager Focus Group). Consequently, the feeling was that commitment to an initiative like empowerment had become uncertain and observation suggested moves towards centralisation and control.

The change in the management team, it's back to reflex, to management by innuendo. (Area Director)

I work in a blame culture, increasingly so, maybe because C.N.'s [previous CE] gone but partly because times are getting tougher, there are less resources, if you read the bits of paper, strategies to manage change, it's all about covering backs, a 'hand washing job', it's changed in the last 18 months 2 years, there's more evidence of it. (District Manager)

The lot at the top have grown up in a command and control environment, a lot with a financial background, a background where they are more comfortable saying how as well as what. (Area Director)

If empowerment was still important to the business, the workshop participants believed that there was still a lack of clarity about the appropriate levels of decision-making and the boundaries of empowerment which would need to be addressed. Participants' deemed *independent* research into, not only the level of empowerment activity taking place, but also the impact it had had on the organisation to be "vital" (Senior Management Development Consultant).

5.3 The Evaluation Project

The evaluation project ran from January to September 1996 and a summary of the main activities is presented in Table 5.1.

Table 5. 1 Chronology of ABC Project

	Evaluation of Empowerment	Organisation
April 1995		Following annual review senior management changes take place including move of CE
June 1995		All senior managers had completed Senior Manager Development Programme -issues re. measurement of empowerment raised during final review process
Oct 1995	Preliminary discussions held between ABC representative and evaluation consultant	
Nov 1995		Change in political climate -Spending cuts result in financial constraints -Increased interest at ministerial level in the potential for ABC work to be outsourced/privatised -Restructuring planned
Dec 1995	Funding available for evaluation project Project specification developed by ABC	
Jan -1996	Discussions took place between ABC representatives and evaluation consultants	
Feb 1996	Bid submitted by external consultants	CE memo to staff outlines pressures being faced by the Agency and the major change programme being introduced
Mar 1996	Contract awarded and first pieces of internal documentation provided	
April 1996	ABC locations to be included identified by ABC and notified to consultants Arrangements for interviews/focus groups made by consultants and ABC Internal documentation provided and analysis begun	
May – June 1996	Interviews and focus groups took place Tapes transcribed and analysis begun	Process of restructuring proceeding
July 1996	Meeting with ABC representatives to discuss findings and agree presentation	CE memo to all staff outlining plans for introduction of private sector partnerships and out-sourcing of certain operations
Sept 1996	Draft report produced and critiqued by ABC representative Findings presented to ABC Management Development Group	

5.3.1 The Process

Under the sponsorship of ABC's Management Development Group, limited funds were made available for an evaluation project to be undertaken using external consultants. The organisation of which I was part at the time already had links with ABC, and in particular NI, an internal ABC Senior Management Development Consultant and the manager responsible for the evaluation project, through one of my colleague's involvement with their Senior Management Development Programme. Having already had some preliminary discussions in October 1995 about a possible project, NI (the Senior Management Development Consultant) approached my colleague in January 1996 when it became clear that some funding would become available to evaluate the impact of the empowerment initiative. My colleague and I developed a bid for the project, which was accepted.

Discussions were held with NI to agree the objectives for the project and discuss how data were to be collected. In terms of participants, NI felt it was desirable to gather a range of views representing front-line staff through to those responsible for policy formation, and we agreed that this was necessary. Within these broad parameters ABC dictated the choice of location but participants within those locations were arranged by their business units and were volunteers.

Comment: There had been some thought on NI's part of including those locations deemed to be high performers and low performers to establish a link between performance and empowerment, it quickly became evident however, that to achieve this would, at best, be a complicated process. Identifying and

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acquiring the performance data would be politically sensitive, as no one was likely to wish to appear in the project as the poor performer, and time-consuming, as the relevant data were dispersed within the organisation and not necessarily held in the format required. In addition, identification of empowered units was largely based on the perceptions held by NI and colleagues as formal monitoring of empowerment had not taken place and was, therefore, not necessarily an opinion that was going to be shared by those operating within those units. In the event, the practicalities of availability, competing initiatives and timing also placed limitations on possible choices.

Senior and middle managers were interviewed on a one-to-one basis but, as time was limited, we decided to interview the lower grades in groups at the various locations. These grades represented the largest numbers of staff and, based on my previous experience of the culture and working practices, we felt were more likely to feel comfortable speaking to us with peer group support. We did not mix grades to avoid problems associated with line management relationships. As two separate people were interviewing in some locations, we agreed beforehand broad areas relating to the research objectives which would be covered, but very much allowed the interview to develop as a focused conversation. All the interviews and focus groups took place over a six-week period in May and June 1996 in four separate geographical locations, were tape recorded and transcribed, then analysed using NUD.IST. In addition, throughout the project, NI provided internal documentation that either he thought relevant or we had identified as of interest.

Comment: *This aspect did highlight a benefit of being a researcher internal to the organisation. In PVS, I was able to have relatively free, uncontrolled, access to internal documentation as I chose without having to rely on a gatekeeper to provide it with the attendant frustrations, delays and limitations inherent in that dependence.*

Following analysis of both the interview data and the internal documentation, a draft report was prepared, using the objectives as the focus and, as originally agreed, sent to NI for consideration. With minor amendments, the report was produced and a presentation based on findings made to the Management Development Group (MDG).

5.3.2 The Purpose

The empowerment initiative itself had had little in the way of specific targets or success criteria established. ABC, as represented by NI and the project specification, appeared to approach this evaluation project with a relatively considered perspective of what they wanted it to achieve and how that result should be arrived at. The initial set of research objectives was quite specific and supported by the outline of a methodological approach:

- *To provide a measure of the current level of empowerment in ABC which can be used as a benchmark for future measurement*
- *A corresponding measure of the level of empowerment which existed when the ABC came into being in 1991*
- *An analysis of how empowerment has had an impact on ABC business - this is the core of the research*
- *Case study work which illustrates the characteristics of the most successful strategies used to introduce empowerment in ABC*
- *An analysis which highlights the potential for and looks at the risks/benefits of further empowerment and delegation in an increasingly cost-driven business operating environment*

(ABC Project Brief, 1996, p. 1)

However, the absence of criteria for success and planning for evaluation at the beginning of the initiative meant that there had not been any formative data collection or assessment. Thus the key source of understanding the degree of change and its impact since 1991 appeared to be in people's memory of how things had been, their experiences and their perception of changes which had taken place. Discussions with NI about the practical limitations of accessing these issues through quantitative approaches resulted in revised terms of reference for the accepted project which focused on four key areas:

- What is the current extent of empowerment compared to the perceived level which existed in ABC in 1991
- What are the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful strategies used to implement empowerment
- What is the impact of empowerment on performance
- What is the potential for further empowerment and delegation in the current business climate and what are the possible risks and benefits involved?

***Comment:** The objectives clearly reflected the 'crossroads' that had been reached within ABC in relation to the empowerment initiative; the culture was changing, the organisation was being restructured, moves were being made to re-centralise certain activities. Areas were to become autonomous business units and the CE who had been perceived as personally championing empowerment was no longer part of the organisation. A consequence of these changes was the perception among its supporters, of whom NI was among the foremost, that empowerment was under threat.*

There's a continuing ongoing debate which still goes on about this is all a load of crap really and what matters is the business...the amount of credence varies quite a lot between Area Directors and District Managers ...there are some Area Directors who are successful in terms of league tables who have not embraced empowerment and point to the fact and say look I'm more successful, I deliver the business, we focus on work issues here and so why should I bother with that? (NI, Senior Management Development Consultant)

It transpired that in reality, rather than ABC identifying the need to assess empowerment, this evaluation project had only happened as an addition to another project which had been planned. The Senior Managers' Development programme, the only formalised aspect of the empowerment initiative, had been a systematised approach with significant financial input and the Senior Management team had required that performance improvement should be measured. NI had volunteered to measure empowerment at the same time.

Because I guess my thinking was, well it's not just about Senior Managers, it's about, it would be more sensible to measure what's happening in the organisation as a result of empowerment initiatives and maybe that helps some people to make up their minds about how much energy they put into it in the future ...I don't think it would have happened if I hadn't been to the MDG and said I think this is a project we ought to do.

Comment: During the project it quickly became clear that the real driver underlying the terms of reference was the desire on the part of those championing the evaluation, particularly NI, to establish the worth of empowerment.

The organisation needs to measure the effect of what people have been doing about empowerment because we've been pouring huge amounts of time and money into it and I think most people think that its been successful but I think there's also a body of opinion within the organisation that remains to be convinced and will only be convinced by what I call a manufactured process to produce what they consider is objective evidence. (NI)

The personal evaluation of those promoting the evaluation was that empowerment worked and was beneficial to the organisation. This positive informal evaluation prompted activity to preserve what had been achieved through formally establishing its value. In response to a perceived threat to the initiative (what Easterby-Smith, 1994, terms 'expediency') the over-riding aim of the sponsors of this evaluation was to prove (Easterby-Smith, 1994) the worth of the initiative in order to defend it.

There was a clarity of purpose in this evaluation, particularly as the agreed objectives were in harmony, or even a product of, the 'hidden' agenda yet the objectives of this evaluation were not widely shared or publicised. Prior to being interviewed few had any idea that empowerment was to be evaluated and even after they knew they were to be involved in the research few were aware of the objectives for the project. Even at quite senior levels it was not clear to individuals why empowerment was being evaluated at that point in time.

I've no idea why they've decided to look at it now, its perhaps that the Senior Management group have noticed it's changing or that they are reviewing the impact of the blue book [reference to Empowerment In ABC] or the worst case scenario there have been crappy decisions lately so we'd best see what empowerment is doing. (Area Director)

Comment: *There did not appear to be any deliberate intent on the part of the sponsors to conceal but, rather, this seemed to be a consequence of the focused nature of the agenda for the evaluation, within which there was not any perceived need to inform more widely.*

5.3.3 The Role of Evaluator

The political context against which this evaluation project took place encouraged the use of external consultants, particularly from an institution that had credibility within the organisation. An external assessment served the purpose of public accountability by being seen to impartially judge the initiative. Provided the outcomes were as hoped by the sponsors, it could also be promoted as unbiased 'expert' support for what had been achieved in the name of empowerment being continued by the new regime.

The primary sponsor (NI, Senior Management Development Consultant) already believed in the value of empowerment and what it had achieved. The need was to convince those who did not or might not share their assessment of its worth sufficiently to support and encourage it in the changed climate. Despite this, there still appeared to be a desire for a fair assessment that would identify not only successes, but also areas where more could be achieved ('improving' as defined by Easterby-Smith, 1994).

The fear was that

an evaluation done in-house would be given a positive gloss, its a bit emperor's new clothes, you aren't allowed to say that the emperor is naked. (Area Director)

The implication being that it would be more acceptable for criticism to be received from an assessment undertaken by those external to the organisation, a view also reflected further down the organisation on the basis of previous experience.

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We had something similar, it wasn't empowerment, we had something similar where the management team had some consultants in looking at what we were doing right or wrong and, at the time, I remember when they came in, everybody said what a waste of time. But when they finished, they came back with some hard-hitting stuff that, a lot of it wasn't easy and it made a few people squirm and a lot of the problems were addressed as a result of those consultants coming in. So I feel that if what you are doing is going to achieve the same results as that team achieved ... I think a lot of problems were addressed and solutions came as a result of that and I think if something similar comes as a result of what you're doing, then that's brilliant. (Middle Manager)

The primary role of an external consultant/evaluator in this project therefore appeared to be the credibility that his/her perceived expertise and impartiality would bring to the results within the organisation, accreditation as defined by Legge (1984).

Comment: *Although the use of external evaluators was intended to provide credibility the tensions identified by Legge (1984) as associated with accreditation were not manifest. The original terms of reference were modified in the light of our advice and no overt attempt was made to influence the course of our research or our findings. Once the project was underway, other than keeping NI or his assistant updated as to progress, we felt we were left to conduct the research as we deemed appropriate. However, our role as consultants who were external to the organisation limited our ability to access documentation and additional information, and we were reliant on NI and his assistant acting as gatekeepers, to locate and provide relevant documentation. In this sense, NI had the potential to at least partially bias our understanding through his ability to limit our access or to filter what was provided. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that this was the case. We were not accompanied during our data collection and no restrictions were placed on our freedom to collect information or test our findings at the locations we visited. We were aware of the 'hidden*

agenda' in the sense of NI's position as a supporter of empowerment and, although we had agreed to submit a draft report, the changes suggested were presentational rather than substantive. There is the possibility, however, that a crisis of accreditation did not arise simply because our approach and findings were compatible with the sponsor's agenda.

The use of external consultants did not increase the credibility for all, however. Among the lower grades, there were some who perceived the use of external consultants as management's way of abdicating responsibility; by removing themselves from the collection of the data and the interaction with participants; they were absolved from having to act upon the findings if they chose not to.

They haven't got to act on it, they just ask you to write a report on what we think is going on so that they know what is going on in the Districts as a whole and then that is it, they haven't asked you to do anything not just a fact-finding thing and then that's the end of it. (Clerical Staff's Focus Group)

Negative experiences in the past meant a number of people were cynical about the value of the evaluation exercise, particularly one that included what they perceived as expensive consultants.

I can't see the point of somebody coming in and speaking to us and seeing what they have found and then passing it back. Why can't the management themselves do that, why can't they bring someone down to do it ...if they want that they can write to people or they can bring people to look for themselves instead of yourselves coming in and writing a report. (Clerical Staff's Focus Group)

I think it would be a better idea, instead of having these things which I think is a bit of a waste of time, save the money and perhaps employ more staff so you wouldn't be under so much pressure. (Clerical Staff's Focus Group)

Comment: *Given the climate of spending cuts and private sector competition, the perceived cost of consultants was a particular irritant for many in the lower*

grades. At this level, few had experienced any useful outcomes produced by consultants as far as they knew and they had only a vague, inflated, idea, of what was being spent, because this sort of information was not commonly shared with them. As Calder (1994) notes, we are only able to make evaluations on the basis of the information to which we have access. From their perspective money was not available to pay sufficient staff to undertake the daily workload, yet management were willing to expend scarce resources on expensive external 'experts' who made no discernable useful contribution.

Legge (1984) also highlights the crisis of verification that occurs when the chosen research methodology conflicts with the needs of managers. In this evaluation, the conflict actually lay between the methodology originally chosen and the objectives of the evaluation. The specified methodology required an extensive questionnaire survey (3,000 participants) plus interviews and focus groups, which was unrealistic within the budget that was available and had practical implications that would delay the project by months, including the need to negotiate with the Trade Union side. In addition, the nature of the initiative and the understanding that the organisation wanted to achieve lent themselves to an exploration of the issues through qualitative means not quantitative. Reflecting the culture of the organisation, NI expressed concern about sample size and the anticipated unacceptability of the results on the basis that the organisation would give more weight to quantitative evidence, in this organisation "*hard facts*" (NI) constituted 'credible evidence' (Patton, 1990, p. 477) and there was a deep-seated unease about little-understood qualitative methods. In order to meet some of these concerns and to increase the perceived credibility of the findings, we agreed to undertake a greater volume of interviews than we would normally have felt necessary.

Comment: *In this case, rather than there being a crisis of verification as described by Legge (1984), the tensions that existed were between the quantitative orientation of the organisation and subjective nature of the phenomenon that the evaluation was attempting to assess. In this case, an independent (not part of the organisation's culture) 'expert' view was necessary to recognise the potential difficulties caused by these tensions and to suggest solutions. Kyriakides and Huddleston (1999) suggest that choice of design should be the evaluator's. Patton (1997) however criticises researchers for having maintained an unwarranted technical image of scientific expertise to preserve their own power and prestige. He suggests that utilisation is likely to be increased if users fully understand the strengths and weaknesses of data and participation in decisions about methods encourages this. The sponsor's acceptance of our role as 'experts' in understanding the range of methods available and the practicalities involved, led to a discussion about possible methods and acceptance of the legitimacy of our advice. The approach ultimately adopted was both mutually agreeable, in our opinion more appropriate for the nature of the study and resulted in an evaluation that was highly regarded by the Management Development Group.*

5.4 Attitudes Towards The Evaluation

The empowerment strategy had not begun with any stated intent to assess its impact and at this point, NI's perception was that there was neither a strong desire nor incentive across the organisation as a whole to measure its effect because

if you haven't got a Board pronouncement of it and there hasn't been something gone out in writing and it hasn't found its way onto their agendas then there is no stimulus to actually monitor progress in a structured way or evaluate it in a structured way ...nobody came to me and said are you going to measure it, nobody in any other function as far as I know embarked on their own measurement.

This was largely a result of the unstructured and almost covert way that the concept of empowerment had been introduced into the organisation.

It comes down to the systematic process again, if you've got a task to do, typically in our organisation it's someone develops a project plan and within that project plan is built an evaluation. This didn't happen like this so it doesn't fit that model, so therefore who is going to put up their hand at some point and say, wait a minute shouldn't we be measuring this? I guess no one, unless it occurs to someone. (NI)

Nor was there pressure in terms of monetary accountability. Other than the Senior Management Development Programme,

nobody actually voted any money at all for it, what happened was that CN [previous CE] and his influence started to work and people started to set up training, development events, team building with empowerment as a theme so they spent their own money, so there's no big central pot of money. (NI)

Comment: *The mainly unstructured way that empowerment was introduced and disseminated throughout the organisation was in sharp contrast to the normal way that initiatives were implemented and therefore appeared to have fallen outside accepted ways of managing and accounting for projects. The fact that money had not been specifically allocated for its introduction lessened the pressure to account for activity and outcomes. The failure to consider evaluation at the beginning meant that no-one had the responsibility to ensure that monitoring and assessment took place and, in a period of continuous change individual's attention was focused on demands for action elsewhere. In addition the strong belief of the original CE that empowerment was inherently right in this context, "Its perfect for that organisation", may have had its effect in*

lessening the perceived need to assess something which was being perceived as intrinsically good and appropriate. If the changing environment had not posed a threat to the initiative, and if there had not been any supporters of empowerment in positions of influence who wished to defend it, it seems unlikely that any formal evaluation would have taken place.

Among those interviewed for the research, there was scepticism about the Senior Management team's commitment to both empowerment and the evaluation in the light of the perceived shifts of attitude and emphasis.

I think it'll [the evaluation] be good provided the Senior Management team really want to know what's going on. (Middle Manager)

With all the cuts of the change programme I don't think empowerment will get better. It will get worse, money drives us, it's going to be whoever produces the goods, will stay, rather than the 'caring for staff' approach, more oppressive. It's a necessary but backward step, the new CE is here to make sure efficiencies happen. (Junior Manager, Focus Group)

Comment: *Ironically, the cynicism of the last quotation highlights the very reasons why the supporters of empowerment had championed an evaluation.*

The quantitative target-orientation of the organisation led to a wider "disbelief" that empowerment could be measured at all, because there

Are different factors at play with it at the same time as this is going on, there are other things that might effect ...there are some people that say it can't be measured because it's about people's views and feelings and that's not objective data. (NI)

Even NI, on a personal level, shared some of the doubts about measuring empowerment.

If it was left to me I wouldn't evaluate it at all because I think its observable, it's manifestly observable ...to evaluate something like this I think is quite a manufactured output.

Comment: *Targets set within the organisation and the language used in connection with measurement and assessment tended to be quantitative, focusing on 'hard' data. As in many organisations, there appeared to be discomfort with qualitative data, a sense that it was somehow lacking in comparison with quantitative data. An organisational perception which was reflected in NI's original concerns about the research and the reaction observed among MDG members after the presentation, my research notes record that some of those present seemed surprised that our interviews of a relatively limited sample should reveal so much that they perceived to be an accurate assessment of the state of play.*

However, NI firmly believed that *"empowerment is the way forward for most organisations"* and his promotion and support of this evaluation project had a very pragmatic underpinning.

I think in order for people, for some people in particular, the kinds of people that are in our organisation, to buy into that kind of belief, they want what they would describe as some kind of objective evidence and I think we're trying to manufacture objectivity out of subjectivity.

On this basis he believed an evaluation project to be both necessary and valuable at this time.

Middle managers, junior managers and clerical staff were unlikely to be aware that the empowerment initiative had been planned or funded differently to other initiatives, which were quite common at this time. This type of information would not be widely available or accessible at grass roots level, therefore it was perceived as a project planned and funded as others had been. For some who were interviewed there had been an expectation, partly based on previous experience, that the initiative would

eventually be evaluated in some way. *"Obviously it had to be evaluated, I mean it's a big project."* (Middle Manager)

It was clear, however, that neither the purpose of the evaluation project nor the process involved had been shared with the bulk of those who were participating. The vast majority of those not participating would have been completely unaware that it was taking place at all. Yet there was interest among those we spoke to (perhaps by definition as they had volunteered to speak to us) who queried what we were doing, and why, and had views as to how an evaluation might most usefully be carried out. The majority of those who participated also expressed interest in learning from the report's findings.

Ideally when you do something like this you are doing it because you have long-term effect, projection, of what you are trying to improve on something, but what is the value when the report comes back? ...I think the responsibility lies with those with the money to make sure that it goes all the way down the ranks, everybody reads it and then we all decide how do we improve on this. (Clerical Staff's Focus Group)

As soon as they've got any information available certainly locally, then they should pass that information to the District straight away, and if they want to follow that up with 'well, this is what our recommendations or whatever are' or 'these are what we think is a summary of the project' should come later because if we are talking about empowerment then we need to decide as a District what we do as a result of what you are doing here and not them decide up there. (Middle Manager)

It should be published and agreed across ABC, asking for comments up the line, take on board adverse reactions and ideas and doing something about it. (Middle Manager)

People were also interested to learn from the experience of others, they did not wish to be insular but wanted to hear both of good practise and failure which had occurred elsewhere in order to set their own experience in context.

I hope you come up with some ideas for us, you know you are talking to lots of people and different people must have tried different things and to see if we are not unique, like this is the same sort of thing, like we shouldn't be too disheartened if we haven't taken the whole lot with us or whatever, what actually comes out if that is what you are finding all over or is it just us? (Middle Manager)

It will be interesting to know how far people have gone, because it is very difficult. (Middle Manager)

Comment: *There was also an issue about fairness and equity of exchange.*

People were participating in the research, giving of their time and opinions, and there was a feeling that this should be responded to.

Communication is a two way process, if there is to be communication I need to get the feedback, if I don't get the feedback it is of no use to anyone. (Clerical Staff's Focus Group)

They had, in effect, created the report and the evaluation that would be made through their contributions and therefore deserved to see the finished product.

There was, however, considerable scepticism, particularly amongst the lower grades, about the use that would be made of the report's findings.

For someone to sit down and just write a report to say this is what we have found it is just a waste of time because they will just look at it and say great and that will be it, with a report they haven't got to act on it. (Clerical Staff's Focus Group)

I think they will sit on it for a long time, I think it will be pushed around on bits of paper for a very, very long time and eventually we may end up with something and that something will be very watered down. (Middle Manager)

It will be put somewhere and we will go on doing what we are doing, we have been doing the same thing for the past, I have been here three years it is the same old, all the different things over the years are changing but it isn't because the reports come back, they go away. (Clerical Staff's, Focus Group)

If they like it, they will put it in a glossy brochure, very glossy ...If they don't like it, they will put it in their filing cabinet in the sky, won't they? (Junior Manager's Focus Group)

Comment: Much of the scepticism about the evaluation was grounded in these communication issues. The staff who were interviewed were conscious that their assessment of empowerment was limited to their own experience and expressed a desire to have information about the wider context and to learn from others. They were, however, in many cases, cynical about the extent to which information would be shared with them, at best expecting it to have been filtered and to have a 'gloss' put on it.

If they like it they will put it in a glossy brochure and give us all a copy, ...they will probably just send one to our office, yes every manager will get one. (Junior Manager's Focus Group)

If the findings were not complimentary the best that staff expected was that they would be 'glossed over', and at worst staff expected to hear nothing at all. This appeared to reflect the previous experience of many of our interviewees that if there were to be any feedback at all it would be filtered through line management.

We are often told that this, this and this happens, but how the conclusion was arrived at would be nice to know. (Junior Manager's Focus Group)

The senior management team will send it out to senior managers who will decide whether it goes down, it will depend what's in it. (Middle Manager)

I think they give the report to District Managers, what they have done and that is it. The District manager probably thinks he has done some work for the Department and that is it, we haven't heard any feedback after that. (Clerical Staff's Focus Group)

Their fears were to some extent given substance by the fact that the project sponsors were clearly focused on higher levels of the management hierarchy in their intentions for dissemination of the results. This is perhaps not surprising given their agenda for the project but seemed to reflect a lack of sensitivity to any equity of exchange for those who had actually participated in the research. There was also evidence of some discomfort with the idea of openly sharing the

information without packaging it first. Our wish to share our findings with all those who participated was, at first, met with surprise and some reluctance by the project sponsors, although, ultimately, we were informed that each participant did receive a copy of the findings.

5.5 Outcomes

In this, project both the formal and informal evaluations were in accord in their findings. The formal evaluation reported that significant headway had been made in changing staff behaviour and attitudes and that empowerment had been instrumental in what had been achieved. In the political and economic climate in which this organisation was operating, the conclusion reported was that empowering staff was probably the only realistic option and that further work was necessary to reinforce an empowering management style. The importance of trust existing between the organisation and its staff and the difficulties of maintaining that were also highlighted.

Despite his early reservations about a qualitative project, NI's response to the draft report was very positive. Some amendments were suggested but these were only minor presentational points plus the insertion of a paragraph outlining the reason for commissioning the report, stressing the Management Development Group's intention to provide the Agency with evidence of what had been achieved through investment in empowerment initiatives. Reading the draft also prompted NI to raise a number of additional questions about empowerment which he would have liked the report to address, such as duplication of effort and the consequent rise in costs, the difference between empowering and command and control business units. However, as the

project had not originally sought to explore these specific areas the data were insufficient to consider these points.

Comment: This offers further evidence to support Weiss' (1990) finding that managers are often not clear about the information they need. In this instance, it was not until evaluation information was provided that NI discovered further questions that it would have been useful to explore. The identification of additional questions may also reflect the changing nature of the context within which the evaluation is taking place, resulting in changing priorities and emphasis. Both circumstances are likely to be more of a problem for summative evaluations (as in this case) when there is less opportunity for incremental change or development than would be possible in an ongoing formative evaluation. In either case, it is conceivable that this could lead to non-utilisation of project findings, in the first instance because, although the outputs match the objectives set, the objectives were inaccurate or insufficient, based on an incomplete understanding on the sponsor's part, and in the second instance, objectives which were meaningful and relevant became less so in the light of subsequent events.

Reflecting the political underpinning to this evaluation, prior to the presentation to the Management Development Group, NI encouraged us to steer our presentation towards focusing on our

views about whether empowerment fits well with the current business direction, what would help overcome barriers, where is the resistance and can it be reframed to overcome resistance?

NI also encouraged us to go beyond the remit and make recommendations about what they should do next.

The reaction to the presentation and the report from the Management Development Group was positive, and it was regarded as a well-researched piece of work that demonstrated that investment had had results. However, following the presentation, the main use of the findings was to provide supporting evidence in bids made by NI for further development initiatives because, in this way,

it has had more impact 'cos I could include it in with something that was proposing something else. (NI)

Comment: *In a sense, this could be interpreted as intentional mis-use of the evaluation findings (Alkin, 1990: Patton, 1997) as selective use was being made of certain aspects to support bids for other initiatives and thus there is a danger of distortion. However, insofar as the original aim had been for the evaluation to demonstrate the positive impact of such an initiative, use in this way is compatible with the original intent and could be argued to be contributing to the improvement of subsequent initiatives.*

The data gathered for the evaluation project clearly demonstrated that those experiencing empowerment, together with those who experienced its lack, were making their own judgements about its worth in the context of their own environment - much as they were about the process of evaluation itself. The findings reported that many staff felt more empowered, for the most part they no longer felt *"hindered and shackled compared to years gone by"* (Middle Manager), all identified changes in ABC since Agency status commonly identified as *"more openness", "freedom to manage"*,

“more consultation” and more “accountability”. Some raised negative aspects such as being asked to take additional responsibility without monetary reward or being given insufficient management support which left them vulnerable to criticism.

Comment: *For most, the informal evaluation based on personal experience and the knowledge shared within their own communities-of-practice was that empowerment had been positive and, without exception, we were told that a return to the “old ways” would be strongly resisted. Individuals, particularly in the Middle Manager grades and below, did, however, recognise that their evaluation was largely limited to personal experience and there was a desire to know what had been done, either successfully or unsuccessfully, in other places. Many wished to have the ‘big picture’ which personal experience on its own was unlikely to provide. It is difficult to see how individuals, particularly at lower levels of organisations, can position their own informal evaluation in a wider context, thereby testing its accuracy and applicability across the organisation, if they are not provided with information about the successes and the failures. In this particular instance, the issue is exacerbated by the nature of the initiative itself which requires trust and responsibility to be placed at the lowest possible level. In fairness such trust must also involve the sharing of information and understanding.*

Some saw the evaluation project as a means of feeding back up the line the positive things that had been achieved through empowerment because their personal evaluation of the current situation led them to believe the freedoms they had gained were now under threat.

There is some feeling that at higher levels things are going backwards, laying down the way that things should be done rather than acting on the advice and input from lower levels, there's a feeling that they're paying lip service to the idea of empowerment and involvement. (Junior Manager)

Comment: *The assumption at senior levels was that the decision could be made to abandon empowerment and staff in the lower grades would passively accept the change. The expectation was that staff would simply follow the direction that they were given, whatever that might be. There was no recognition of the effect of the positive informal evaluations of empowerment that people were making, based on their own experience of the initiative.*

Certainly among those working in the middle management, junior management and clerical grades, the evaluation of empowerment appeared to be an ongoing process much as outlined by NI.

Individuals could do it on their own, just by keeping their eyes open and talking to people and then they could make their own mind up. It doesn't need to be a piece of central research. If people were of a mind to make their own mind up or felt they were able to make their own mind up and then act on it without being backed up by either sanction from above, central research etcetera.

The limitation of this idealistic approach was its subjectivity in a culture which valued 'hard' data, the filtering effect on messages passed up through lines of management before they reached the top (if they ever did) and the difficulty of drawing together an overview without someone taking responsibility for it. The impact of empowerment had been felt throughout the organisation but, in keeping with the original customer-orientation, perhaps felt most strongly by those at the 'sharp end' of the organisation. However, without a deliberate intent and effort, the size and structure of the organisation made it extremely difficult for those at

the top of the structure to appreciate the reality of its effect on those at the bottom and vice versa. Consequently, any evaluation based solely on personal experience was inevitably an incomplete picture, something which those in the lowest grades appeared more aware of than those above them.

5.6 The Learning And Implications For The Next Case

Evidence of some of the barriers described in the literature and some of those identified in the previous case were found. There were obstacles relating to grand strategy, managerial dominance, technical forces, linearity, context, informal evaluations and utilisation of findings. There was also a new variation relating to the crises of verification. An additional area which emerged related to the negative perception of the use of external consultants. Barriers which had been previously identified in either the literature or the first case that did not appear here were purpose, concern about HR variables and negative expectations relating to the attribution of blame. Table 5.2 provides a summary and the key points are then summarised in more detail in the sections that follow.

Table 5.2 The Barriers Identified In The Case Study

	Case 2 ABC
Barriers Which Were Predicted By The Literature	
Absence of clear purpose	X
Addiction of managers to grand strategy	X
Technical	X
Dominance of one stake-holder group (management)	X
Hidden Agendas	
<i>Evaluation perceived as backward looking</i>	
Linear approach to change	X
Disagreements about methodology (crisis of verification)	
Lack of evaluation expertise	
Crisis of accreditation	X
Findings challenge assumptions of dominant stakeholders	
Factors Which Created Barriers That Had Not Been Identified By The Literature	
Informal, personal evaluations	X
Absence of Senior Management requirement for evaluation	X
Assumption that initiative had inherent benefits	X
Organisational culture	X
Negative expectations resulting from use of previous evaluation findings (blame culture)	X
Use of external consultants	X
Evaluator bias	

Quotes from the literature appear in Times New Roman.
Quotes from the case study evidence appear in *Lucinda Sans*.
Descriptive body text appears in Arial.
My comments appear in *Arial Italic* and are offset.

5.6.1 Confirmation Of Barriers Previously Identified

5.6.1.1 Strategy

It was usual within this organisation for initiatives to be introduced in a planned and structured way, supported by a budget that required accountability. The empowerment initiative was an exception. It originated with the CE (the staff's perception throughout was that it was closely associated with him on a personal basis), in the form of a *concept rather than a systematic, clearly specified initiative*. In this 'grand strategy', as Tichy (1983) warns, criteria for success and responsibility for monitoring its implementation were not included. Nor were there any of the normal organisational drivers which would have required evaluation as the initiative was not supported by a specific budget or targets nor was there a specified individual with responsibility for its implementation.

5.6.1.2 Linearity

In this initiative, formal evaluation was not considered until five years after the introduction of the initiative, an example of evaluation only being addressed at towards the end of an initiative. Consequently, data had not been collected during that period and it was necessary to rely on people's experiences and memories to provide the information needed, *a form of data not immediately credible within this organisation*.

5.6.1.3 Managerial Focus

The driving force behind the evaluation project was the desire of certain individuals in management positions to persuade those at the very top of the organisation of the positive impact of the initiative and the potential benefits of its continuance. This aim

was very much in accord with the views of those in lower grades who also believed empowerment to be positive. However, the project sponsors gave little thought to the involvement of the lower grades other than as providers of evidence. Little thought had been given to the sharing of results but, when prompted, it was clear that it was assumed that results would be interpreted and filtered when and if they were shared.

5.6.1.4 *Technical*

ABC was a target- and measurement-oriented organisation wherein quantitative approaches were the norm and had an assumed inherent credibility. Reflecting Tichy's (1983) classification of technical forces which act against evaluation in terms of 'soft' initiatives such as empowerment, there was scepticism about the feasibility of meaningful and credible measurement (including NI), particularly using qualitative methods which did not produce 'hard' numeric data.

5.6.1.5 *Context*

As in the previous case, the context and culture of this organisation were significant in relation to the evaluation. Although there was clear evidence of evaluation in the context of quantitative measurement, it appeared that it was less likely for "touchy-feely" initiatives to be evaluated, because there was uncertainty about how this should be done in a credible and effective way. In the context of the project, the inclination to measure in quantitative terms produced conflict between the objectives and methodology as originally specified and the actual knowledge that the sponsors believed that they needed, a variation on Legge's (1984) crisis of verification.

The nature of the organisation was such that people throughout the hierarchy looked to their line management for direction on current priorities and expectations and the 'messages', both implicit and explicit, would be cascaded down through the levels of the organisation. The CE had not indicated that an evaluation of empowerment was expected or required no individual had been given responsibility for it nor had success criteria been set. Thus within this culture it was not perceived as something which was required or valued. It required a change in the external environment and a perceived threat to the initiative to prompt its supporters to evaluate it as a means of defending it.

5.6.1.6 *Informal Evaluation*

The CE who initiated empowerment was firmly convinced that it something which was inherently good and right for the organisation, and this may have removed any impetus on his part for a formal evaluation, particularly as, without agreed targets or financing there was unlikely to be a requirement for him to account for it to the Secretary of State.

5.6.1.7 *Utilisation*

Those who were in lower grades were sceptical about the use of findings that were not complimentary and certainly did not expect to share in the information before it had been filtered, edited and interpreted, if at all. They, however, perceived a need for equity of exchange of which management appeared unaware. On this basis, cumulative experience of participation and provision of information without reciprocation would be likely to lead to non-participation in the future.

5.6.2 Additional Barriers Identified In This Case

5.6.2.1 Use Of External Consultants

Rather than lending credibility as defined in Legge's (1984) crisis of accreditation previous experience led to some hostility towards the use of external consultants for this type of project on the grounds of cost and management detachment, a view voiced most strongly among the lower grades. Rather than increasing the credibility of the project amongst these groups of staff, the use of external consultants, regardless of who they were or where they were from, threatened to undermine it.

5.6.3 Previously Identified Barriers Which Did Not Appear

5.6.3.1 Purpose

There was a clear purpose for this evaluation, the assessment of the effect of empowerment, which was consistent with the 'hidden agenda' of the project sponsors who sought to demonstrate the value of the initiative. In addition, although the objectives and purpose of the evaluation were not widely broadcast, participants in the research all supported the idea of demonstrating what they perceived as the benefits of empowerment.

5.6.3.2 Negative Expectations

Most respondents believed that they were operating in a blame culture, particularly in recent months, yet no one suggested that the evaluation would be negative in the sense that it would result in the attribution of blame. This may have been because the majority perceived empowerment as positive, therefore there would be no blame necessary, or that they accepted our assurances that findings would not be reported in

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a way which made them attributable to any individual or group, or perhaps because the anticipated filtering and sanitising would depersonalise the findings.

Chapter 6 Case Study Three – NJD

6.1. Introduction

The third case study is set in NJD and concerns the evaluation of the first year of a mentoring scheme introduced for new staff and as such is more contained and focused than the initiatives involved in the other case studies. In comparison to the previous cases this evaluation was less formal, smaller scale and purely internal, undertaken by the manager responsible for the initiative's implementation.

6.2. The Context

6.2.1. The Organisation

The organisation described here is an educational institution that is significantly smaller than those considered in the previous case studies and provides education services on a local rather than a national basis. The organisation employs approximately 400 staff (a mix of teaching and support staff) located on three sites all situated within the same town in the South Midlands.

6.2.2. The Organisation and Evaluation

As might be expected in an academic organisation, the concept of evaluation was a familiar one.

Evaluation is very much part of academic work. (Manager)

It should be second nature to a teacher. (Chief Executive)

It was clear from the interviews that people were used to evaluating both their courses and the student experience of the facilities regularly.

Comment: *Despite this, "some curriculum areas are atrocious at evaluating" (Chief Executive) and most of the anecdotes relating to evaluation that were told during my interviews centred around the limitations of the process in relation to students and curriculum matters. "Its always the same things that come up, the catering's awful, the buildings not good, teaching's fine." (Lecturer)*

Evaluation of non-curriculum areas was less certain ground. The Chief Executive (CE) was quite clear that, in the past, evaluation was something that had "*always happened*" in both curriculum and non-curriculum areas, for example

we've always had a strong policy about evaluating any sort of staff development. (CE)

Yet the Staff Training and Development Manager's view was that

staff training and development is at times in a little bit of well not exactly a cul-de-sac ... there's a sense that nobody in this place worries about staff development until they think that something needs to be done and then they say what is staff training and development doing about this, if you see what I mean, evaluation could be more, there's a lack of connection somehow to the bigger picture.

However, while recognising the importance of evaluation and the need for senior management commitment, the CE also recognised that it was not necessarily something which had been done appropriately.

We should at the beginning, give it quite a lot of thought and we don't give it a lot of thought, I don't give it enough thought and therefore if the person in charge doesn't ...as I say, because its quite difficult to do and for a lot of people they don't really want to although people have a project they really want to run for they don't want to tell people about whether it worked or not they just want to do it. (CE)

Other managers shared the view that the approach to evaluation was not satisfactory, but for more 'positive' reasons, particularly in the context of HR initiatives.

We're not dissimilar to a lot of organisations in that yes its a good thing and yes we ought to do it but somehow it seems to get lost because you're so busy and we've done it and we've got through it and yeah, we will evaluate it, but we think we know anyway what it was. (Personnel Manager)

Nor had evaluation necessarily been effective even if it had been carried out “because really good evaluation is probably more difficult than the project itself.” (CE) and, in the past, there had also been a lack of clarity about what was to be measured and assessed which had exacerbated the difficulties. Management under the previous CE

was very, very concerned about process but I think we handled it badly, ...people felt the outcomes weren't looked at , in fact they ignored the outcomes, they also ignored the process because they didn't really understand the process that was going on so in fact you've got here the worst of both worlds, you have no real measure. (CE)

Criticism in a recent Government inspection had focused senior management attention on the importance of effective measures of performance because

The hard measures i.e. retention rates, examination results were pretty average so we've got this lovely caring, cuddly management style but actually its not translating into business so what are we doing about it? (CE)

This had resulted in the governing body becoming more focused on outcomes and it was now

very, very keen on measure ... they've now said, look, we want some really hard targets, measurable, quantifiable. (CE)

We're moving towards internal audit. (Manager)

Comment: Many of the staff perceived this focus on “number crunching, percentage, etcetera” (Lecturer/Mentor) as primarily negative, with feedback being in the form of statistics from which we “pick out all the bad ones,” (Lecturer/Mentor) and with no understanding of the underlying issues. “A lot of

the explanation underlying these figures gets missed.” (Lecturer/mentor)

Assessment of performance was associated with criticism and blame.

Despite the CE’s belief that evaluation had always been done, albeit imperfectly, for the staff in the lower levels of the organisation, evaluation in non-academic contexts was not something with which they were familiar.

I have no experience of evaluating non-academic things; everything we do is linked to academic or a vocational programme so that’s how our evaluation is covered. (Lecturer/Mentor)

Even for the manager undertaking this evaluation project

I think that there is clearly an evaluation structure in terms of [teaching] programme evaluation and that’s where I’ve come from in the sense that my background is curriculum ... I’m just trying to equate it with the non-curriculum side ‘cos. I don’t come from that side so I’ve no sense of evaluation.

Comment: *Nor was there any expectation that an evaluation would be part of non-academic initiatives amongst those interviewed.*

No, I haven’t seen it happen before, and within the changes that have already occurred, there has been literally no discussion about it anywhere. It’s very much you will accept it and that’s it ...I would have hoped they would have stood back and looked at how it impacted on people but I mean literally from listening to other people I don’t think that happens at all. (Lecturer/Mentor)

There isn’t a lot of managing going on, there isn’t a lot of direction, people are too busy pushing things through, it needs a key individual driver saying they must evaluate. (Lecturer/Mentor)

Others who were interviewed also raised the points made in the latter comment; evaluation was an inevitable casualty when many changes were being pushed through at once and when no one had individual responsibility for ensuring that it took place. Echoing Patrickson et al. (1995), it certainly seemed that in the non-curriculum areas, in the eyes of its staff at least, this organisation was not devoting the same amount of energy to evaluation as it was to driving change initiatives through.

The restructuring of the organisation and new contracting arrangements combined with the increased interest in 'hard' measures led to unease amongst staff.

It's becoming a business and somewhere along the line people are being hurt, people are losing their jobs, and so the caring approach just disappears. (Lecturer/Mentor)

This served to reinforce the existence of a background 'blame culture' against which any evaluation would take place. Senior management were

quite critical of their staff and their achievements and what they do, which is not of itself a problem provided its balanced with the positive and the praise for the good, but they are quick to jump on things that irritate them, annoy them, that they are not happy with. I think this means they are constantly looking at and saying this isn't working and that isn't working, we're not happy with this we're not happy with that. (Personnel Manager)

Other interviewees believed that while individual departments might accept mistakes as a means of learning, the organisation as a whole had a low tolerance level which served to discourage people from trying new things and taking risks. The CE recognised a reluctance to evaluate because of fears about the anticipated outcomes of an evaluation process.

I would say that the problem is what does evaluation mean to most people, they are expecting evaluation to mean I will evaluate you and tell you, you are awful and there is huge fear around evaluation.

As CE, she was trying to change this attitude but recognised the difficulties.

When I went and saw the staff about restructuring, I made a big play of that then I gave for the first time an opening staff address in September and said again much more about positive, although I did say again that I wanted people to make mistakes in this organisation and that was important, and actually if you weren't making mistakes you weren't doing your job properly, but that isn't about incompetence and if you're incompetent you wouldn't have a job here but if you made a mistake that was fine and then I defined what I thought was a mistake and what I thought was incompetence but again for me I am so far removed it's actually making sure that the people I manage have the message and the people they manage have the message. (CE)

6.2.3. The Organisation and Mentoring

The consensus among those interviewed was that, within NJD, the supporting of new or less experienced members of staff by colleagues, or mentoring, was something which did happen historically, albeit on an informal and sporadic basis.

*I'm sure it was going on but in a kind of ad hoc way ... the point about the system was that it formalised what was probably happening anyway.
(Training and Development Manager)*

There had not been any previous attempt to introduce a formal system of mentoring and there were those sceptical about the need for such an initiative on the basis that “well, you know this is happening already” (Training and Development Manager). However circumstances within the organisation were in the process of significant change, including new contracting arrangements, restructuring and the appointment of a new CE with the result “that there’s an awful lot of unrest ...everyone’s under incredible pressure” (Personnel Manager). The fear was that without some form of formal recognition for mentoring, “maybe ...it would have died on its feet because of the pressure people are under.” (Training and Development Manager).

The move to formalise the system originated in a management and professional development day which focused on communication across the organisation. Within this forum, a participant suggested mentoring as something that could improve the level of understanding of the communications within NJD. However, the translation of this into a practical scheme appears to have been largely due to the personal commitment and efforts of one individual, KS. KS was present at that meeting, which took place before her appointment as Staff Training and Development Manager, and on a personal level

it occurred to me that there was a need for that, I was very much in sympathy with it, I saw it as another thread of support ... and I felt within the organisation that there, although I didn’t articulate it with anyone, was a need for a supportive framework that was not connected with line management and I saw this as a possible way of obtaining that.

Negotiations were taking place at that time for KS to assume the role of Staff Training and Development Manager and she identified a mentoring scheme as “one of my planks” in the new role. At that time, the individual who would be the CE at the time of the evaluation project was the senior manager responsible for marketing and development and, prior to KS’s appointment as Staff Training and Development Manager, had responsibility for staff development. She also perceived that a mentoring scheme would have positive benefits for the organisation.

I would see that mentoring is about supporting people in, that were new into an organisation so that they became accustomed to the ways we work here and what it is like here ...imbuing people with the culture and the environment they're coming into, and then I think there's the next thing about supervision, which is having somebody to check out with, that's less threatening cos. It's not a manager. (CE)

This, she felt, would offer a means of addressing issues of staff turnover, demotivation and quality.

I was very keen to have mentoring at NJD particularly for teaching staff 'cos. I think the support staff have been better at directly supporting each other than the teaching staff and I think there was an assumption that because many teaching staff had done degrees and then done PGCEs that they were fine. They could just come in and do the job and be left and I think that one of the reasons why (a) you have demotivated staff, and (b) the reasons why we don't have the quality that I would like to see of teachers here is because we don't have an effective mentoring system and people don't see why things are done in a particular way. (CE)

For these reasons, both in the role of Senior Marketing and Development Manager and later as CE, she was supportive of KS 's intention to implement a mentoring scheme as part of her new role.

In preparation for the introduction of a scheme, KS attended a training day run by an external educational training group which focused on mentoring in establishments similar to NJD and offered a model which had been successfully implemented elsewhere.

I decided to start with an induction model because that's, if you like, the place where people enter the organisation and if the message that, or the model that's formed there is actually quite important for sending a message about some other kind of support other than that of line management so that was the place to start. (K S)

This decision was reinforced by pragmatic considerations in that by the time KS was appointed, it was late in the academic year (June) and the one-day course she attended

happened to be, when I got there, about induction mentoring so I had a kind of structure which I went with. (KS)

The model consisted of five points during the first academic year, week one, week four, week thirteen, six months and then nine months, at which the induction experience of the mentee was reviewed under a series of specified headings with the mentor. Each of the reviews was accompanied by a report form which was to be completed during the discussion, in the first two instances by the mentee, in the second two by the mentor and in the final case by both, either separately or jointly. All the forms were seen not only by KS but also by the appropriate line managers, a practise which was found to cause problems in terms of confidentiality. The scheme began with a two-hour mentor training session for mentors at end of the previous academic year during which the skills and qualities for the mentoring role were explored and the supporting documentation explained. This was followed in late August/early September by an induction programme for new staff during which mentors and mentees met and the first set of forms were completed.

The intention was that all new permanent staff who had at least a 0.5 contract should be linked with a mentor and this resulted in 32 people requiring a mentor.

What I didn't realise was the sheer numbers that would go through in the course of the year so I thought it might be about 12 to 15 mentors and it was a relatively small scheme it turned out to be 32 and therefore was a bigger operation. (KS)

In practical terms, timetables and allocation of hours had already been agreed and the climate was particularly sensitive as new contracts had been introduced and

people were very sensitive about the number of hours and were really feeling they were being asked to do too many things. (K S)

A twelve-hour time value for the mentoring work was agreed and, as an incentive, KS introduced the idea of a “*pump priming payment*” funded from the Staff Development Budget. This could either go to the individuals if they were acting as mentor over and above their timetabled hours or to the cost centre where mentoring was incorporated in the timetable. This payment was to be made only for this first year of the scheme. Mentors were to be volunteers, albeit identified by line managers,

Our manager came round asking us to take on this. (Lecturer/Mentor)
Volunteer, one step forward? (DS)
Yes and here you are we'll pay you £90 for a year and I'm sure you'll get on with her very well and thank you very much and that was it (Lecturer/Mentor)

I was in at the beginning when they started this off, when they, I use the word appointed, mentors I wasn't quite sure of the system they used for appointing mentors. There was more than a bit of who would like to do it so they weren't selected in my view, they weren't selected properly anyway, it was just who fancied doing it. That's how I got into it I think, I walked in at the time the memo arrived or something. (Lecturer/Mentor)

Comment: *The result was a wide variety both in terms of the people acting as mentors and the pairings that occurred. One mentor had been employed for less than 18 months while others had been with the organisation for years; some pairs were part of the same team, some were not; some people were mentored by those who were junior in grade, some by peers, others by those more senior. The absence of any specific criteria on which individuals should be chosen as mentors and the resultant diverse nature of the group appears somewhat incompatible with the aspirations expressed by the CE for the impact of mentoring.*

6.3. The Evaluation Project

The period covered by the evaluation was September 1996 to June 1997. Data was collected at various points in the form of mentoring reports and review meetings held in January, the formal evaluation process, however, was concentrated in the period May to July 1997 when the analysis of data and production of a formal report took place. Table 6.1 summarises the main activities.

Table 6.1 Chronology of NJD Project

	Evaluation Project	Organisation
May 1996		KS negotiating for staff T & D post Management and professional development day- mentoring suggested and KS supports the idea
June 1996		KS appointed New contracts being issued
July – Aug 1996		Negotiations with managers for mentors Appointment of new CE
Sept 1996	First meeting between mentees and mentors. Mentoring forms submitted to KS	Intake of new staff
Oct 1996	Second mentoring reviews completed Mentoring forms submitted to KS	
Dec 1997	Third mentoring reviews Mentoring forms submitted to KS	
Jan 1997	Separate evaluation meetings with KS for mentors and mentees	
Mar 1997	Fourth mentoring review Mentoring forms submitted to KS	Management restructuring
April 1997		KS excluded from management team meetings
May 1997	Fifth mentoring review Mentoring forms submitted to KS	
June 1997	Evaluation working party set up – first meeting	End of academic year
July 1997	Second meeting of evaluation working party KS interviewing line managers Report produced	

6.3.1. The Process

On a pragmatic basis, KS had intended to evaluate the mechanics of the scheme from the beginning primarily because

I sort of thought there are aspects of this that are useful and then let's evaluate as we go 'cos. I was well aware that I was taking something off the shelf so there was a real need to evaluate it just to see how it would work. (K S)

True to the organisational culture where

getting together in committees and groups to talk about things is the norm. (Personnel Manager)

and

the mindset is that if you evaluate you must have a form providing evidence, wherever it has tried to assess things it has been very paper-driven. (Lecturer/Mentor)

The primary mechanisms for the evaluation were the review forms and group meetings. In January 1997, three months after the scheme had begun, mentors and mentees were invited to separate sessions with KS to make an “initial evaluation”; 24 mentors and 10 mentees attended their respective sessions. The discussion prompt used in the sessions focused on the processes and the documentation involved in the scheme, for example, “do meetings seem to have been at the right intervals?”, “what would you suggest might be a useful format and content for the documentation for the final meeting?”. Using the discussion prompt, KS divided participants into groups to discuss the topics and to feedback their views. Her overall assessment was that the feedback from the mentors “was very positive even though some negative things came out”, but less so for the mentees where more negatives emerged. A summary of the strengths and concerns identified during the January sessions was sent to all participants.

Comment: While KS appeared reasonably content that this process had identified the important issues, others were less convinced. One of the Lecturer/Mentors reported that

a lot of comments weren't picked up on ...they just focused on specific aspects that mentors were having problems with which I suppose is a form of evaluation, I mean there was a lot of feedback with that but perhaps what was noted down wasn't a true reflection of what people were saying.

In June 1997, mentors and mentees were once again invited to participate in an evaluation of the scheme. Those line managers who had had responsibility for mentors and/or mentees were not included in the invitation; instead, their views were collected on a rather ad hoc basis through individual conversations with KS. The response to the invitation was more limited with only three mentors and one mentee volunteering to participate. Together with KS and a representative from the Staff Training and Development Committee, they formed the membership of a working party to discuss the summary drawn up by KS based on the final evaluation forms completed by the pairs.

Comment: *In my observation notes, I have recorded that 'KS is steering the proceedings like a teaching session', this almost certainly reflects her curriculum management background. The fact that this approach wasn't questioned or challenged by participants may reflect the dominant teaching background/culture that they all shared. It may also reflect their view that their participation was to help KS and it was essentially about contributing to what she was doing rather than there being any perceived benefit for them.*

KS produced a short written report primarily targeted at the members of the Directorate but which was also circulated to the mentors, mentees and relevant line managers. In

addition, a flier (a single A4 sheet) was produced for wider circulation that summarised the 'key' aspects of the scheme.

6.3.2. The Purpose

KS was clear on a personal level about the intentions of the mentoring scheme which she saw primarily from the perspective of the individual. She acknowledged that there also needed to be added value for the organisation but her articulation of the prospective benefits was entirely related to the individual.

I was more focused on what the individuals would get out of it but I did also recognise that the institution ought to benefit and needs to see the benefit because it costs, but from an individual's point of view I focused on really formalising what I thought was probably happening informally anyway and I suppose the institutional side of it was a recognition and a valuing, valuing in a kind of prosaic way, like saying this represents X number of hours of somebody's time ...you are giving it some kind of support, some kind of structure which at the same time is sending messages about valuing this system, so it was a combination of kind of the importance of the individual but putting it very firmly in an organisational structure which it didn't have before.. (K S)

There appeared to be an underlying assumption that mentoring through benefiting the individual must benefit the wider organisation, but there was little evidence of any questioning of the fundamental value of the programme in that sense. CE also expressed her hopes for the outcome of the programme in terms of the individual benefits rather than organisational gains.

If staff feel supported and valued then in itself that's been of value and worth running it. (CE)

This emphasis was also communicated to those involved as mentors.

*What was the expectation that was to come out of the programme? (DS)
Support, support and care." (Lecturer/Mentor)
Was there any explanation of the value of supporting that member of staff in the sense of what the organisation would get out of that, what your department will get out of it? (DS)
No, it was very one to one (Lecturer/Mentor)*

*Was there any sense of what the organisation was getting out of this? (DS)
Not the organisation, individuals. (Lecturer/Mentor)*

Comment: *In common with many programmes (Patton 1997) and the previous cases, there does not appear to have been any formal or clear articulation of specific objectives for the initiative.*

Was it clear at the beginning what the objectives of the programme were? (DS)

No, not really, it didn't work like that. (Lecturer/Mentor)

Even with the benefit of hindsight the final report, (Report on the Induction Scheme, Internal Memorandum, 1997) gives only vague general statements about the intent of the initiative to reflect the mission statement and to formalise the system with an implicit suggestion that this would improve it.

As with the mentoring initiative, there do not appear to have been any formally articulated or shared objectives for the evaluation project.

I don't think the objectives of the evaluation are clearly laid down; it was left very open as to how we went about the evaluation. (Lecturer/Mentor)

None of the interviewees were sure that objectives had ever been clearly or specifically identified, although some felt that they had been implicit, particularly after the January 1997 meetings.

Comment:

Some things are put in place ...there's a very clear reason why we're doing it and I would want a particular outcome and I would want to know whether we'd got that outcome or not, I suppose mentoring to me is much more, its difficult to measure, its about people's attitudes. For me, in a way, if staff feel supported and valued then in itself that's been of value and worth running it. (CE)

This view offers perhaps some explanation for the lack of clear objectives for both the initiative and the evaluation. It also suggests a further example of the problem previously identified by CE of management failing to think through the

evaluation of an initiative sufficiently early and clearly. In that sense, it is a further example of a 'grand strategy' (Tichy, 1983) rather than a clearly specified and systematically assessed initiative.

As the person undertaking the evaluation, KS pragmatically wanted to assess how well the 'off the peg' scheme worked in NJD and the changes that might be needed.

However, her personal circumstances of impending retirement had created an underlying private objective aimed at ensuring a scheme continued after she had left through making realistic and workable recommendations.

I do intend to capture the work that's been done, say hey this has happened and these things have evolved from it and these are the recommendations I'm making for next year that they will need to put in place. One of my pressures is to recommend a system which will survive in economic times which are stringent, there isn't much point in having the best quality system if you can't afford it.

Comment: Both of these objectives largely focused on the processes involved rather than any wider assessment of organisational impact, and this was certainly reflected in how others involved saw the implied objectives of the evaluation.

To see what we felt about the scheme, what we felt about the paperwork that supported it, what changes we thought would be helpful for the next cycle of the scheme, what things went well and what things didn't go well, both I guess on a personal level and generally. (Manager/Mentee)

To get it right next year for the new mentees coming in and for the mentors as well ...now we've gone through the cycle we can look at what was good, what was bad, implement a really better programme. (Lecturer/Mentor)

6.3.3. The Role of Evaluator

In this case study, there was never any question of an evaluator other than KS being used on this initiative; this reflects both the relatively low key nature of the project and

practice taken from the curriculum areas where the role of implementer and evaluator were closely linked. An important element is also the personal commitment and status of the individual concerned in this instance, which ensured that both the initiative and its evaluation took place. In KS's view, her personal commitment to the mentoring scheme was the main reason for its introduction at that particular point in time.

It needed somebody, I think, with a degree of status, and I don't just mean position within the organisation, I think it was about respect for somebody and I'm not blowing my own trumpet here but I've been in the [organisation] quite a long time and I think people generally think I know what I'm talking about and when I organise something I usually see it through ... it did need a driver yes it did need someone to see it through.
(KS)

KS believed that the choices about whether to evaluate or not and how it should be done were entirely hers and that there would not have been any pressure or penalty if she had chosen not to do it. This view appears to be supported by the CE's comment that

KS was left to do it in her own way completely ...because I think its important that she does, she can only do it in the way she can do it therefore to be too involved skews it and ruins it, particularly for mentoring and K S is very sensitive to people so I knew she would pick up on anything that needed to be picked up on. (CE)

The CE expressed confidence that KS had the necessary skills to establish a mentoring scheme and a process of evaluation successfully and to overcome potential difficulties, a view shared by all those interviewed. The CE described KS' s "good interpersonal skills" as instrumental in the context of the mentoring initiative in "actually seeing people, managers personally and getting the right people."

Comment: *Interestingly, despite KS being responsible for the creation and implementation of the scheme, the CE described her as being open-minded about it.*

One of the reasons why I think, which is why I think KS's evaluation is good because I don't think she had a view one way or another about mentoring so her evaluation is truly an open evaluation, I think too much evaluation is I know what I want to come of this, and I'll evaluate it and, oh, look the results match what I wanted. (CE)

Yet, the reality was that KS was a believer in mentoring as a beneficial and positive addition to organisational life. She did not question its fundamental value to the organisation but appeared to take it for granted because she perceived mentoring to be inherently beneficial. Although there was a shared and genuine belief in KS's ability to both implement and evaluate the initiative effectively with little management direction, this may have reflected House's (1977) point that people do not want a neutral evaluator. They want someone who is concerned about the issues, which was certainly true in KS's case. There may also have been an element on the CE's part of justifying a political decision that had led to the isolation of KS in terms of management support. One consequence of the organisational restructuring was the formation of a new management team. There was, however, a transitional period when some of the 'old' managers, of which KS was one, were still in their existing posts prior to retiring or moving elsewhere. CE decided

I had to exclude the old managers to build the team so for about the last three months we've been working with the new managers and the old managers haven't been invited.

This was a choice which, in retrospect, the CE may not have been entirely comfortable with "I made the conscious decision and maybe it was wrong."

6.3.4. Attitudes towards the Evaluation

As already discussed, the CE spoke of her support for evaluation both in terms of the wider concept and in this particular project.

I think to me evaluation is important because you actually learn from it. It closes a loop, it give you feedback ...I think it's a major part of your learning experience.

However, the messages conveyed by senior management actions were not always as positive. The involvement of the senior management in the restructuring, compounded by the isolation of KS, meant that the perception of KS was that, effectively, she did not have any forum available at which to discuss the approach or mechanics of the evaluation and so worked to her own agenda. Her only support mechanism was the Staff Development and Training Committee, an advisory body with a membership comprised of representatives of support and teaching staff, the only manager involved in the committee being KS herself.

Comment: *The exclusion of the 'old managers' from the management team meant that avenues of communication and influence had effectively been closed for KS.*

The difficulty is that because of my situation which is perhaps rather marginalised now I don't go to management meetings I don't know although I pick it up from some other people I don't necessarily know just quite where things are and I haven't at the moment got a clear structure other than my line manager, I had meetings before but they've been, well, if I say I haven't been to a meeting since the third of May you can see from that connections aren't as good so I've tended to plough on a little on my own. (KS)

The CE's positive and supportive comments did suggest a genuine personal commitment to the concept and importance of evaluation, "you should never, ever do anything without having evaluated what you're doing and why you're doing it", which appears to have been subsumed by other priorities and political judgements in this instance. The CE admitted that she had not raised the project or evaluation with the most senior levels of management. The exclusion of the 'old managers' had the additional effect of implying to both the 'old managers', and a wider audience, that neither they nor their work was valued.

The general assumption appeared to be that because KS was implementing the initiative an evaluation would inevitably take place *"I knew KS would do one"* (Manager) but largely based on the perception that KS would want to know how well the scheme had worked in process terms. As Easterby-Smith (1994) notes, potential informants may refuse to co-operate with evaluators often because they have other more important priorities and, in this case, while the majority completed the final review form, there was a clear reluctance among those involved in the initiative to participate in the later stages of the evaluation as evidenced by the small number of volunteers.

Comment: *This may have been due to the timing (end of the summer term)*

*People in some departments have started to wind down therefore they are not interested in getting involved. I would like to think its cos. people are now busy working but I suspect its not so
(Lecturer/mentor)*

It may have been due to the feeling expressed by some of those who participated (and some who did not) in the evaluation working group that to do so was on the basis of helping KS rather than advancing either the organisation's or their own understanding and therefore it was not a particularly high priority.

*I did not attend the evaluation meeting, number one because I was too busy, number two because I think I knew enough about it, I knew enough about people's views, I had passed my views forward in writing and I really didn't feel I needed to go over it yet again. I understand from KS's point of view that its her baby and, obviously, she wanted to be very clear about how people felt about it and what she needed to change, so I had no argument with that at all. But, from my point of view, I felt the whole thing had sort of gone on and on, for me personally it had been of extremely limited benefit.
(Personnel Manager/Mentee)*

In addition, there seemed to be a sense in which the whole thing was going on too long and individuals "didn't need it any more" (Lecturer/Mentee); it had become meaningless. One Lecturer/Mentee described it as "a form filling exercise and you don't know what the end result is" much like the evaluation of training courses which took place within the organisation and where

you think it's just another chore and you think well what is the point, what actually happens to it, are they, is there a room somewhere that's full of these forms or are they just kept and then put in the wastepaper basket to be recycled, I don't know.

Those who participated in the evaluation were unclear about how the findings were to be used, but some had made their own assumptions based on the way curriculum evaluations were used.

*I have no idea, we have not, I mean we literally have not been told, but I presume it's to improve the programme for the next academic year but no information has been given as to how it will be used.
(Lecturer/Mentor)*

As well as improving the mechanics of the programme, people also felt the evaluation data could be used to provide valuable information for future mentors and mentees.

It's actually a way of making the next group hopefully learn and be aware of the experiences that other people have had so they perhaps don't fall into the same trap. (CE)

Other than this potential usefulness for the next set of mentors and mentees that everyone identified, views about interest in the findings were mixed. Some felt that it would only be of interest to those who already were, or became in the future, directly involved in the scheme. Others believed that it should be of interest to every employee on the basis that the assimilation of new staff affected everyone in the organisation in some way.

KS had identified difficulties in undertaking the evaluation in terms of the nature of the initiative.

Its hard to evaluate a whole system when you've got 16 different combinations of essences, you know how do you really go about it ...it is actually quite hard to evaluate some of the issues it's so people centred and depends so much on the quality of what somebody is prepared or not prepared to do and to receive. (KS)

However, difficulties also existed due to the negative connotations of evaluation for

people within the organisation.

Evaluation is about openness, it needs confidence and a degree of courage, you have to acknowledge the fact that you might be wrong,

and the reality that *“evaluation is often about blame, criticism.”*

6.3.5. Outcomes

Due to her impending retirement and the difficulties of communicating with senior management, KS had decided that a written document was likely to be the most effective way to report the evaluation findings but had some reservations.

I will make sure it's put on paper and goes to senior managers, what I fear at the moment though is perhaps things are not read because other things are seen to be more pressing. (KS)

The formal findings of the overall evaluation were reported very positively in the short written report circulated to mentors, mentees, line managers and members of the Directorate. Mentoring, it was reported, had been found to be of use to both the mentees and, more unexpectedly, the mentors. The mentees had found the support and guidance useful and it had helped them to understand their department and the organisation more quickly. It had been valuable to the mentors in causing them to reflect on their own practise and to develop good working relationships. There was no consideration within the report of detailed costs or overall value to the organisation.

The primary recommendation stated that the induction mentoring scheme should be continued as a

formal mentoring structure is evidence of a 'caring' organisation with commitment to formal growth. (KS, 1997).

Further recommendations related to the process in terms of structure and documentation, timing, choice of mentor and line manager support. The net effect of the recommendations if implemented, would be to

- Shorten the programme from nine months to six,
- Reduce the time allowances for mentoring
- Incorporate it in the staff development programme, thereby formally recognising the scheme.

The report also recommended retaining flexibility in choice of mentor and making it clear that the mentoring scheme was not part of the line management structure, although reference was not made to any of the less positive feedback that underpinned these recommendations. The report also states that more should be done to tell others about the scheme and noted that a short general 'flier' was to be issued to all staff to raise awareness of the scheme and the evaluation findings.

Comment: *The nature of the report for senior management was unsurprising as the findings reflected KS's commitment to continuation of the scheme both in terms of the positive outcomes and the economically realistic recommendations which would increase the likelihood of the scheme continuing. In this sense, the report was serving a socio-political function (Nevo 1986) in creating a positive perception of the scheme with the intention of motivating a desired behaviour on the part of the senior management team. In contrast to the other cases, efforts had been made to circulate some findings to those who had been involved (a summary of the January 1997 review meetings had been circulated to line managers, mentors and mentees). Yet, at the time of writing the report for senior management, little thought had been given to wider interest or use of findings until prompted by my questions, at which point the idea of the flier was conceived. Interestingly the flier did include some of the negative findings that are not explicitly covered in the report, in recognition, perhaps, that staff might already have heard about people's views via informal communication channels.*

On this basis, the findings were 'mis-used' (Alkin, 1990) in the way that they were presented to the senior management, promoting the benefits and glossing over the criticisms in relation to the initiative, yet with the best of intentions.

The organisation's mission statement focuses on the importance of ongoing individual development, for both staff and students, and the comments on evaluation forms suggested that people involved in the scheme saw it as evidence of that commitment in action. KS summarised this for the Evaluation Working Party as

we say that we are working to develop everyone's potential and the mentoring system is really about that as much as anything and therefore by having a mentoring system which was official you were giving proof that the culture was being followed, observed, there was evidence that it was being followed. (KS)

Members of the group seemed to have no difficulty accepting this as an accurate reflection of the general view held.

Comment: *In private, KS was more cynical. When I asked if she thought staff had bought into the notion that mentoring means managers care, her reaction was*

not really, no to be honest with you, because they have more work to do on what are already higher rates than ever before so I don't think they do buy it and I sometimes think am I part of this network to make things appear better when they're not really. (KS)

Although not formally stated, the conclusion reached by those involved was that the organisation wanted the mentor role to be about care of the individual. This limited perspective on the mentor role led to disappointment for some.

I think it was fairly clear what the organisation saw as a mentor programme ...my understanding of the term mentor comes from elsewhere, was a professional mentor and so I found it slightly strange. (Personnel Manager/Mentee)

I don't think they were selected properly, you see, I think the mentor's more of a champion, more as a mentor i.e. the individual looks up and they set good examples and the mentor represents the culture of the organisation. (Lecturer/Mentor)

This had left them with a sense of the organisation having missed an opportunity by introducing a very limited scheme. In contrast there appeared to be a widespread acceptance that any form of mentoring was a good thing and no attempt was made to question or test its value in an organisational context, an absence which only a few appeared to have noted.

It was more the system that we're looking at rather than what's mentoring all about, what's this initiative supposed to achieve and has it achieved it, I think they've not asked the right questions. (Lecturer/Mentor)

Comment: *This may also have contributed to the lack of interest in the evaluation; if people believed that the initiative was perceived by management as being fundamentally good, "I've always thought mentoring schemes were good" (CE), and the evaluation itself only about the details of process and documentation, participation may indeed rank as a fairly low priority.*

6.4. The Learning from this Case

Barriers found in the literature and the previous case studies which also appeared in this case related to strategy, managerial dominance, purpose, technical forces, context, informal evaluation, negative expectations, accreditation and the utilisation of findings. An additional area which emerged related to evaluator bias. Barriers which had previously been identified which were not present were verification, linearity and concern about disentangling HR variables. In this section the barriers identified are compared to those predicted in the literature in Table 6.2. and then summarised in the subsequent sub-sections .

Table 6.2 Barriers Identified In The Case Study

	Case 3 NJD
Barriers Which Were Predicted By The Literature	
<i>Absence of clear purpose</i>	X
Addiction of managers to grand strategy	X
Technical	X
Dominance of one stake-holder group (management)	X
Hidden Agendas	
Evaluation perceived as backward looking	
Linear approach to change	
Disagreements about methodology (crisis of verification)	
Lack of evaluation expertise	
Crisis of accreditation	X
Findings challenge assumptions of dominant stakeholders	
Factors Which Created Barriers That Had Not Been Identified By The Literature	
Informal, personal evaluations	X
Absence of Senior Management requirement for evaluation	X
Assumption that initiative had inherent benefits	X
Organisational culture	X
Negative expectations resulting from use of previous evaluation findings (blame culture)	X
Use of external consultants	
Evaluator bias	X

6.4.1. Confirmation of Barriers Previously Identified

6.4.1.1. Strategy

Rather than being instigated by senior management, the primary architect and driver of this initiative was the Training and Development Manager. It did, however, have the support of the CE and its adoption shared the characteristics of a 'grand strategy' (Tichy, 1983) in that the decision was based on a belief in the inherent benefit of mentoring for the organisation rather than a considered assessment, and it was introduced without its intended outcomes and success criteria being clearly specified.

6.4.1.2 Purpose

Despite there not having been any objectives set for the initiative the evaluator was quite clear about the purpose of the evaluation, not least because it reflected her personal agenda, but it was not explicitly stated or publicly articulated. Consequently her clarity was not shared by those who participated and this resulted in a perception that it was being undertaken for KS's benefit rather than as something that would benefit the whole organisation or even those who participated. On this basis, participation in the evaluation did not rate as a high priority activity, particularly after the mentoring cycle had been completed.

6.4.1.3 Managerial Focus

The main purpose behind the evaluation was to influence senior management decisions about the continuation of the scheme and this formed the primary focus in terms of presenting the findings. It is not therefore surprising that initial thoughts about communication and use of the findings focused on raising management understanding and awareness. As in the other cases, it appears little detailed thought was given in the early stages as to how the data might be specifically used or to their relevance for a

wider audience. Those participating in the evaluation remained uncertain about their use and drew their own conclusions based on other experiences as to how wide interest should or would be. Without exception, they felt that those who had participated should be told about the findings in return for the input they had made, not least because this would provide a sense of closure to this stage of the initiative. However, in comparison to the other cases, there was a greater awareness on the part of KS of the importance of sharing the findings more generally, and the filtering which took place was in respect of the information shared with senior management.

6.4.1.4 *Technical*

There was some evidence of a numerical orientation developing in relation to assessment within the organisation and KS perceived this type of people oriented initiative as difficult to evaluate because of the range of views and perspectives. Her concern was primarily at the level of process, and there did not appear to be any recognition or understanding by KS or the CE of a need to assess the organisational impact of the initiative.

6.4.1.5 *Context*

As in previous cases, the context within which the initiative took place influenced the evaluation. The initiative to be evaluated in this case was comparatively small scale in terms of both its scope and its place in the strategy of the organisation, and was set against a background of significant restructuring and culture change. The effect of the restructuring on the evaluator was to severely limit the opportunities for management support and debate and to send negative messages to both KS and the wider organisation about the level of importance of the work in which she was engaged. This perception of a relatively low priority may well have impacted on the willingness of individuals to become involved in the evaluation process, particularly at the end of the

initiative when its relevance was perceived to have diminished and people had clearly made their own assessments about its value.

The curriculum focus of most people within the organisation meant that expectations of evaluation were grounded in that context, and there was little experience of non-curriculum evaluation. There were no formal objectives set for the scheme and management were unlikely to press for it. However, the culture of the organisation was that curriculum areas were evaluated as the 'norm', thus having a teaching/curriculum management background KS's intention had been to evaluate the 'off the peg' process in much the same way as a course would be evaluated. It is likely that any information generated by this type of evaluation would have had a limited circulation focused on improving the scheme for the next intake. Instead, the changes both within the organisation and her own status created a threat to the initiative and prompted her, as its champion, to evaluate not only as a means of improving the process but also as a means of promoting and protecting the initiative which she was championing. Thus, the context in which the evaluation took place moved the evaluation from an activity focused on improving to one of proving its value and worth (Easterby-Smith 1994).

6.4.1.6 Informal Evaluation

KS and the CE, the two key players in this initiative, perceived mentoring as something inherently beneficial for any organisation. This mitigated against there being any perceived need for a debate or assessment of the initiative's value to the organisation which Preskill and Torres (1999a) argue is a key purpose of evaluation. This was compounded by a lack of wider management involvement in establishing the intent or design of both the mentoring initiative and the evaluation process which might have broadened it beyond a primarily process-oriented assessment. The focus that was adopted encouraged people to see it as comparable to 'happy sheet'-oriented training

evaluation, of relevance to those delivering the programme and subsequent cohorts rather than having any value for those who have participated in the programme.

6.4.1.7 Negative Expectations

The wider context of evaluation within the organisation was of something relating primarily to curriculum matters, which was difficult, not done well and often led to blame being attributed. The current climate within the organisation led to expectations of criticism and faultfinding.

6.4.1.8 Accreditation

The degree of standing and respect held by KS within the organisation was perceived as a key attribute that made her particularly suitable to champion both the mentoring scheme and the evaluation. Both the CE and her peers placed a high degree of trust in her abilities and competence. Although undoubtedly deserved, this also meant that her ability to undertake an unbiased and relevant evaluation went unquestioned.

6.4.1.9 Utilisation

In this evaluation, the findings were mis-used in the sense that the report sent to senior management focused on the positive outcomes as a means of promoting and protecting the initiative.

6.4.2. Additional Barriers Identified

6.4.2.1. Evaluator Bias

Despite the CE's apparent perception that KS was open and unbiased, it is difficult to see how, as the creator and implementer of a programme, even the most professional person could truly approach the evaluation without bias. In this situation, the factors involved in being an evaluator internal to both the project and the organisation were

compounded by KS's position, her knowledge that she would be handing over the responsibility of the scheme to someone else, and her strong desire to see it perpetuated, albeit recognising it would have to be in a more economical form.

6.4.3. Barriers Which Were Not Present

6.4.3.1. Validation

As the evaluation was solely the responsibility of the implementer of the programme and she had complete discretion in relation to the way it was undertaken, a crisis of validation did not occur.

6.4.3.2 Linearity

Although the primary evaluation was summative, there had been recognition, by KS, of a need to evaluate the process from an early stage, and there had been some ongoing evaluation throughout the implementation of the initiative.

Chapter 7 Emergent Themes

7.1. Introduction

In the preceding chapters, the evidence from each case study was considered and the themes and patterns identified. The next step is to compare and contrast the findings across the case studies in search of the ‘interesting generalisations’ (Remenyi *et al.*, 1998, p. 134), which may provide illumination above and beyond the individual case. This chapter builds on the understanding developed through analysis of the data in each case and identifies both common themes and variations between cases, in order to highlight the factors likely to create barriers to the evaluation of HRM initiatives in organisations.

Within the chapter, the factors that created barriers in the three cases are drawn together and a number of barriers that were common across the cases emerge. Table 7.1 summarises the occurrence of factors which created barriers in the three cases, both those identified within the literature and those previously unspecified that emerged from the data, and demonstrates that a number of barriers were common across the cases.

Quotes from the literature appear in Times New Roman.
Quotes from the case study evidence appear in *Lucinda Sans*.
Descriptive body text appears in Arial
My comments appear in *Arial Italic* and are offset.

Table 7. 1 Summary of Barriers Identified In The Cases

	Case 1 PVS	Case 2 ABC	Case 3 NJD
Barriers Which Were Predicted By The Literature			
Absence of clear purpose	X	X	X
Addiction of managers to grand strategy	X	X	X
Technical	X	X	X
Dominance of one stake-holder group (management)	X	X	X
Hidden Agendas			
Evaluation perceived as backward looking			
Linear approach to change	X	X	
Disagreements about methodology (crisis of verification)			
Lack of evaluation expertise			
Crisis of accreditation		X	X
Findings challenge assumptions of dominant stakeholders			
Factors Which Created Barriers That Had Not Been Identified By The Literature			
Informal, personal evaluations	X	X	X
Absence of Senior Management requirement for evaluation	X	X	X
Assumption that initiative had inherent benefits	X	X	X
Organisational culture	X	X	X
Negative expectations resulting from use of previous evaluation findings (blame culture)	X	X	X
Use of external consultants	X	X	
Evaluator bias			X

Key: **X** denotes evidence of this found in case study.

These barriers, and the factors that created them, are discussed and the existence of two categories, or types, of barrier is proposed. Primary barriers are those which occurred before a decision to evaluate had been taken, acted to prevent formal evaluation taking place and may explain why evaluation is so rarely undertaken. Secondary barriers occur once the decision to evaluate has been made and are created by factors involved in, and integral to, the evaluation process itself. In addition, informal evaluation is discussed as a separate underlying theme having emerged as something which clearly occurs at all levels of the organisation, underpins contributions to the formal evaluation and which acts as a significant causal factor in the creation of both primary and secondary barriers.

7.2. The Context

In the identification of barriers to evaluation the literature tends to focus on the process itself and the wider organisational context receives limited attention, yet, in each of the three case studies, it proved to be the source of real and significant barriers to an evaluation being undertaken.

7.2.1. The Historical Perspective

In none of the case studies did anyone claim that evaluation was something which was done well in their organisation and in each of the three organisations people's experience suggested that *"we don't tend to evaluate touchy-feely stuff."*

Historically, therefore, there was little evidence within the organisations of effective evaluation, particularly in the context of 'soft' initiatives. Nor was there any perception that senior management placed any value on such evaluations taking place. As the Head of Training in PVS said, *"if your line manager isn't interested in it, it's not going to be in your objectives, and if there's nothing formal about it ..."*, the implication being that it just will not happen. This perception continued even after these

particular evaluations had taken place, “*managers are not encouraged to think in evaluative terms,*” (liP Project Director, PVS), “*there is no stimulus to evaluate in a structured way,*” (Senior Management Development Consultant, ABC), “*you think its just another chore and you think, well, what is the point?*” (Lecturer/Mentee, NJD).

DesAutels (1997) describes the information provided by the evaluation of policies and programmes as essential to accountability. Certainly, the previous experience of people within these three organisations suggested that, when it had occurred, this had been the primary purpose of any evaluation, a purpose which resulted in criticism and the apportioning of responsibility for failure. Fox (1989), writing about the evaluation of organisational and management development programmes, comments that these evaluations are experienced as difficult ‘precisely because evaluative judgements must be made openly about people’ (p. 192). The evidence from the case studies suggests that this difficulty also relates to HRM initiatives. In each case, there was evidence that individuals perceived themselves as operating in a blame culture in which the use of previous evaluation findings had been negative and divisive rather than as a positive vehicle for improvement and shared learning.

Comment: *The previous history of evaluation within these organisations, particularly in relation to ‘soft’ initiatives, provided little encouragement for anyone to undertake an evaluation of these initiatives. There was little evidence that it could be done successfully or that it would result in positive outcomes. Given that managers at all levels of organisations struggle constantly with both the pressure to succeed and the pressure of time (Swanson, 1997), they are unlikely to undertake activities that they do not perceive to be considered a priority by their superiors and for which they have not been given specific responsibility.*

7.2.2. The 'Grand Strategy' Approach

Nor, in respect of the initiatives under consideration here, were there any indications to challenge the perceptions that had formed as a result of previous experience. In each case, the decision by senior management to introduce the initiative had the characteristics that Tichy (1983) described as an 'addiction' to grand strategy, senior management interest and involvement focused on the creation of the initiative rather than the specifics of its implementation. The consequences included the failure to define success criteria or to designate responsibility for monitoring progress, with the result that neither the information, nor the resources, necessary for an evaluation were readily available.

***Comment:** The term 'addiction' seems inappropriate here, however, as there was evidence to suggest that this was not necessarily the typical senior management approach to all strategic decisions within these organisations; in ABC, for example, participants noted that the unstructured way that empowerment had been introduced was unusual. The reasons for this difference require further research but factors which are discussed in some detail later in this chapter, such as the assumed inherent 'goodness' of the initiative, its compatibility with organisational values and uncertainty about ways of assessing success, may well create barriers at Senior Management levels which discourage commitment to particular criteria and processes in the context of 'soft' HRM initiatives.*

The 'grand strategy' approach of senior management in these particular initiatives does, however, echo the findings of earlier research (Skinner and Mabey, 1997) in which, in the majority of cases, the most senior managers in organisations were found to be heavily involved during the conception and initiation stages of an HRM change process but not during the implementation.

7.2.3. The Assumed Value of the Initiative

In each of these organisations, the initiative in question directly related to the culture, values and public image perceived as desirable and which senior management wished to promote. In each case, senior management perceived the initiative selected here as a means of addressing issues, both potential and actual, which related to the desired state. Within PVS, the concept of equality of opportunity was a widely-shared and deeply-held organisational value, and it was assumed that the 'Fair Selection' training programmes would ensure that there was equity in the selection processes; in ABC, empowerment would enable the organisation to become more efficient at the same time as offering a better service to clients and increased job satisfaction to staff; in NJD, mentoring would not only socialise staff more quickly but also improve communications, increase motivation and reduce turnover. Yet, in none of the cases was any serious thought given to assessing the impact of the initiative on the organisation. Objectives, expected outcomes or success criteria for the initiatives were not articulated at the outset, something that Reynolds and Ablett (1998) warn is a major problem and which they claim will make evaluation impossible.

Comment: An explanation for this may be found in the attitude of top management towards these initiatives. Bowen and Siehl (1997) suggest that influencing the creation or reinforcement of widely-shared values and strong organisational cultures is a new and important challenge in the HRM field, while Tyson (1999, p. 45) argues that managers are 'not passive bystanders when it comes to the importation of new ideas,' selecting, reinterpreting and giving relative emphasis to ideas according to their own agendas. In each case, the senior managers responsible for initiating the process believed in the inherent value of the HRM reform in question; the CE in ABC firmly believed that empowerment was right for that organisation, the CE of NJD "always thought that mentoring

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schemes were good", and the fair selection approach was congruent with the dominant, unquestioned, cultural values of PVS. As Brunnsen and Olsen (1998) suggest, these reforms were perceived to have an inherent value of their own and assumptions were being made, albeit to some extent sub-consciously and in very general terms, that there would be benefits which would inevitably result from their introduction. There was no evidence of a detailed or considered assessment of either the organisational need or the appropriateness of these particular strategies in these contexts before they were introduced.

7.2.4. Imitation v. Innovation

Swanson (1997, p. 9) warns that time pressures may drive managers to implement the 'quick fixes to substantive problems' being promoted by marketers, while Brunnsen and Olsen (1998, p. 302) suggest that problems, solutions and their standardised effects tend to come in 'prefabricated packages'. Swanson's remarks in relation to time do not appear to hold true for PVS and ABC where the initiatives themselves were implemented over lengthy timescales, but it is perhaps more applicable to the case of NJD, where an 'off the peg' mentoring scheme was implemented, although, even here, this was a vehicle for implementing a decision already made rather than the means of identifying a solution to a problem.

Comment: *Brunsson and Olsen's (1998, p. 301) argument that it is easier to imitate than innovate has more resonance in these cases because the reality is that these managers were subject to significant pressures and there was uncertainty about the assessment of the 'soft' performance areas. The current environment is one in which other organisations are eager to show off their successes, and the academic and practitioner literature promote the beneficial effects of HRM initiatives. Researchers largely draw attention to the 'good' rather*

than those that have failed (Garrick, 1998) and management gurus contrast the complexities of manager's own experience with success stories and processes encapsulated in simplified formulae (Huczynski, 1993). It is difficult to see an incentive to do anything other than 'learn' from the positive experience of others and imitate their success. On this basis, it is not surprising that, in each case, general assumptions were made that the outcomes of HRM initiatives such as these must be positive, particularly as in each case, the reform in question both supported and promoted the values and image important to the organisation. This unquestioned belief that there would be an inevitable benefit to the organisation from introducing such initiatives reduces the perceived need to evaluate formally – those responsible for its initiation already 'know' that its effect will be positive.

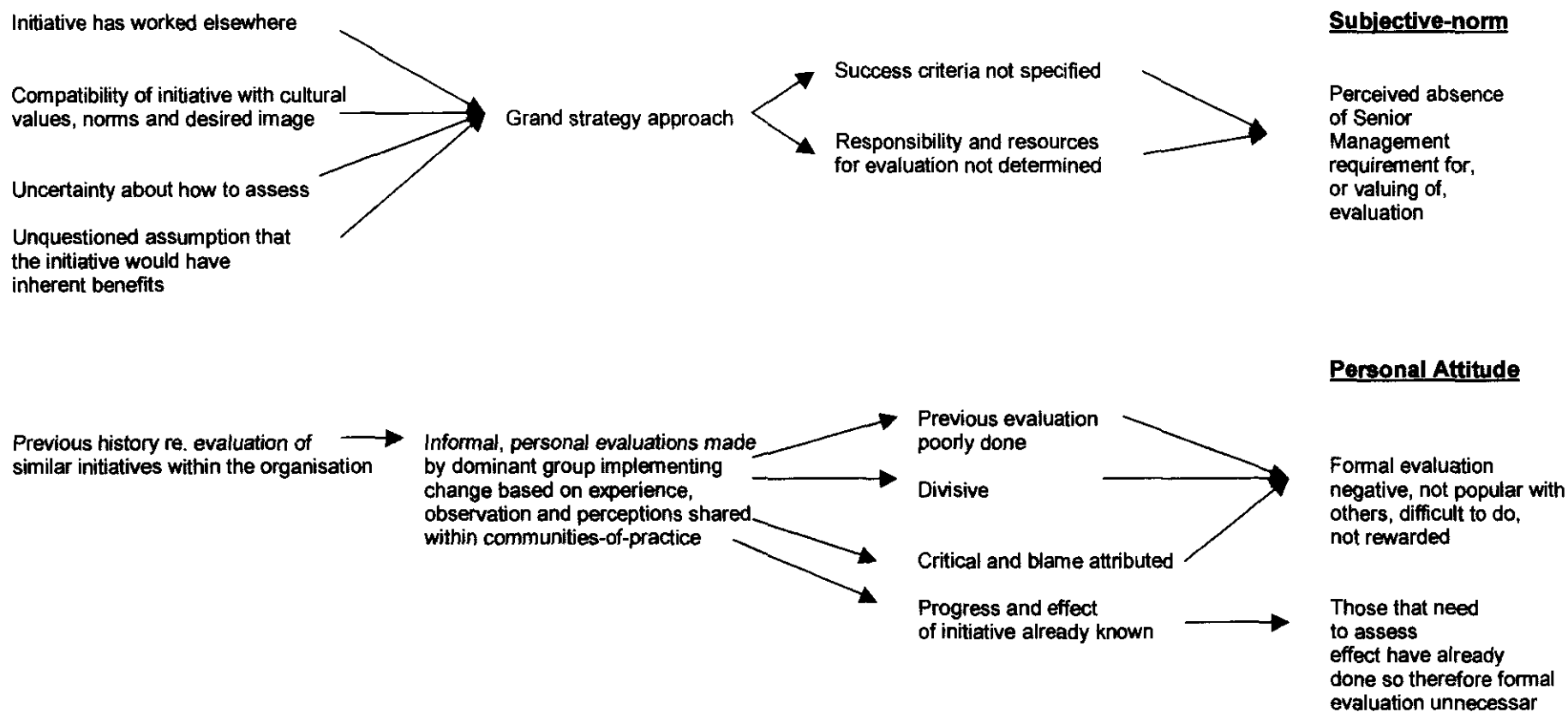
7.2.5. Comment on the Significance of Contextual Factors

It is clear from the evidence in the three cases that these contextual factors have a significant cumulative influence on the way that formal evaluation is perceived. Drawing together the contextual factors discussed so far and considering their cumulative effect using the reasoned action model of Fishbein and Ajzen (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Ellis and Arieli, 1999; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) a serious barrier to formal evaluation emerges. This model has been successfully applied to predict behaviour in many areas and the evidence suggests that the theory is useful in explaining most social behaviours and applies to most people (Ellis and Arieli, 1999). In this context it offers an explanation of why formal evaluations rarely take place.

The reasoned action model postulates that the factor that determines whether a person will carry out a behaviour is in itself determined by the person's attitude towards the behaviour and the subjective norm - their belief (informal evaluation)

about what significant others think about whether they should engage in that behaviour, weighted by their motivation to comply with the referent's expectation opinions. Figure 7.1 illustrates the effect of contextual factors found in the case studies in the context of reasoned action.

Figure 7.1 Non-evaluation as a Reasoned Action



Despite each of the managers who were responsible for the evaluations articulating the 'accepted' reasons why evaluation was necessary and how it could benefit the organisation, on a personal level, they were clearly aware of the negative connotations of formal evaluation for managers and staff in these organisations and, in that sense, the inherent risks involved both in terms of receiving personal criticism and of the activity being unpopular with peers and others who may feel vulnerable. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) suggest that it is reasonable to feel social pressure not to perform a behaviour if those with whom you wish to comply think you should not perform it. For many, their past experience was of evaluation which had not been well done and which resulted in personal criticism, the attribution of blame and 'opening a can of worms'. On this basis, it seems unlikely that the attitude of individuals towards the behaviour, the undertaking of evaluation, would be very positive in the context of their own organisation

In relation to the subjective norms which existed in the three organisations, Preskill and Torres (1999a) identify three barriers to reflection which relate to the disincentives found in the cases; performance pressure in which time for reflection is a luxury and can be ill-afforded, competency traps where it is easier and quicker to keep doing what we have done in the past even if it is not best or most effective, and the failure of the leadership and the organisational culture to reward learning. In the case studies we are concerned with here, the managers had limited resources available to them and, all things being equal, in the interests of their own security, satisfaction and longer term goals, could be expected to use those resources in pursuit of outcomes/activities which they perceived likely to be valued most highly by those above them, those who are in a position to reward success. Indeed, Butcher and Clarke (1999) argue that a

rational consideration of organisational change implementation requires recognition that the management of personal self-interest must be central to its success.

Observations of previous actions and decisions in relation to the evaluation of similar initiatives within the organisation did not suggest that rewards and learning were its primary focus. Combined with the absence of any stated success criteria, assumptions about the inherent goodness of the initiative and the lack of any discernable senior management requirement for evaluation a subjective norm was created which said that evaluation was not an activity highly valued by significant others. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) argue that an individual's behaviour follows logically and systematically from whatever information is available, and on this basis, neither the person's attitude towards the behaviour nor the subjective norm were likely to result in evaluation being perceived as a priority activity. Combined with the belief that "evaluation is more difficult than the project" (CE, NJD), we "can't measure people's feelings and views", (Senior Development Consultant, ABC), and "it's perverse, interesting and difficult", (IIP Project Director, PVS), there would seem little incentive to pursue it unless the circumstances changed and raised its degree of importance at an individual or organisational level.

Clearly then, within each of the case studies, there were contextual factors which acted as significant deterrents to the undertaking of a formal evaluation. First level or primary barriers existed, created by the cumulative effect of a number of factors as perceived by those with the necessary power and influence to publicly assess what had been achieved. It required a change in circumstances, a prompt for evaluation, to create a perceived need for formal evaluation. Without these

prompts, it is questionable, particularly in the cases of PVS and ABC where the initiatives had already been running for some considerable time without evaluation, whether a formal evaluation would ever have taken place. In NJD, KS's background as a curriculum manager, wherein evaluation of a programme was the norm, meant that some form of evaluation was more likely to occur, but the findings would probably not have been widely circulated and would primarily have been used by KS to make improvements to the programme. In each case, the prompt was sufficient to change the balance in the reasoned action equation in favour of evaluation being undertaken and, in each case, once the decision to evaluate had been taken, other issues and obstacles, secondary barriers, became relevant.

7.3. The Prompt For Evaluation

The prompts were different in each case. All were external to the project, yet, each had a significant impact on the underlying agenda for the evaluation. In the case of ABC and NJD, the personal commitment of the individuals who took responsibility for the evaluation project of the HRM initiative was also a key factor in triggering formal evaluation activity.

For PVS and 'Fair Selection', the external prompt was the desire to achieve liP status and as such this evaluation was a means to an end unconnected with the initiative itself. liP accreditation required certain standards and levels of activity in respect of evaluation, which PVS clearly did not have in place. The evaluation of 'Fair Selection' provided a vehicle for the development of an evaluation framework and a demonstration of its potential. Thus, the agenda outlined by the Director Of Equal Opportunities became secondary to the need of the liP requirements as interpreted by the liP Project Team and the consultants.

In the cases of ABC and NJD, the catalyst was a perceived threat to the initiative itself. In ABC, it was the change of political climate and senior management personnel that highlighted uncertainties about the place of empowerment, and not only posed a threat to the continuation of the initiative, but created a scenario in which people sensed a move to reverse the positive things which had been achieved. The extent to which the mentoring programme in NJD was closely linked to the personal belief and commitment of its implementer meant the real possibility that her decision to retire would also mean the end of the initiative, unless its value was clearly and publicly established. While this was not an objective that was widely shared, its relevance was reinforced by her exclusion from the management circle once she had decided not to be part of the restructured organisation.

7.4. The Formal Evaluation Process.

Once the need for a formal evaluation had been agreed it became necessary for decisions to be made in relation to the process itself and at this point secondary barriers emerge. A variety of issues relating to choices of approach, evaluator, participation and use of findings had to be addressed at each stage of the evaluation. The choices to be made would affect the extent and nature of the evaluation and the ultimate effectiveness of the process, but the decisions made were in themselves constrained by the existence of barriers and had, in their turn, the potential to create further barriers

7.4.1. Linear Change and the Purpose of Evaluation

Bruce (1998, p. 25) argues that

no matter how well the change has been planned it should not be assumed that it has been successful. There is a close correlation between the success of change projects with the willingness to set and monitor against clear performance metrics

However, Patton (1997 p. 152) notes that evaluators ‘seldom find a statement of clear, specific, prioritised, and measurable goals’ and these cases were no exception. Neither the initiatives nor the evaluations had clearly-considered and stated objectives that had been shared with those participating. In his criticism of the linear approach to change commonly found in the literature Carr (1997, p. 227) argues that it is somewhat bizarre for theorists to consider a manager moving through a series of steps or stages without doing some formative evaluation along the way to confirm that the process is still on track, yet, at a formal level, that is exactly what happened in both PVS and ABC. The absence of success criteria for each initiative removed the need to assign responsibility or resource for assessment, with the result in the two long-term projects that the data necessary to undertake an evaluation was not collected, a situation which was irretrievable and made the subsequent evaluation difficult.

Necessity required both PVS and ABC to articulate objectives for the evaluations in order to brief the consultants. These objectives had their limitations however, and were not widely shared. In PVS, the situation was complicated by the needs of liP being superimposed on the evaluation of the initiative, and this increased the level of difficulty involved in defining a clear set of objectives. From the beginning, this translated into a lack of focus and vagueness of purpose that caused uncertainty and tension, not least because the scope and extent of the project kept changing. The original objectives identified by ABC did not reflect the reality of what was either possible or necessary within the constraints and needs of the project and had to be revised. That a lack of clarity still remained, however, was demonstrated by the additional questions identified by the sponsor once the evaluation had been completed and the ‘gaps’ in the agreed brief were exposed. Similar to PVS, those participating in the evaluation in ABC were unaware of any detailed objectives for the evaluation but had a broad idea and had made assumptions based on their expectations and experience. In NJD, the objectives

for the evaluation were not formally stated. KS was clear at a personal level why she felt that evaluation needed to take place; however, the others involved in the process were unaware of any specified objectives and had arrived at their own interpretation of its purpose, based on past experience of the organisation.

***Comment:** In each of the three cases, the assessment was intended to serve a purpose in addition to understanding the value and outcomes of the initiative itself; it was about demonstrating or proving something which was important to those involved. Contrary to warnings given within the literature (for example, Easterby-Smith, 1994) concerning the dangers of hidden agendas which distort the purpose of the evaluation, the hidden agendas held by those responsible for the evaluation served as a driving force rather than as a barrier. In both PVS and ABC, the evaluation was summative, clearly reactive (Stufflebeam, 1972) and, in terms of the initiative itself, fits Easterby-Smith's (1994) definition of proving (the measurement of worth and impact). However this was merely contributing to an overarching purpose, more akin to Nevo's (1986) socio-political function, where the primary purpose of the evaluation was to be used for a communicative purpose intended to create awareness or motivate desired behaviour. This was quite explicit in PVS, as pursuit of liP status and the need to meet the requirements of the standard was a visible activity within the organisation, and it was quite clear that the evaluation of 'Fair Selection' took place in that context. In ABC, the objective of demonstrating what the initiative had achieved in order to influence senior management attitudes, thereby protecting the initiative, was not a formally stated objective, nevertheless, the desirability of pursuing this purpose was quite widely-perceived and shared. In the case of NJD, from the beginning there was some evidence of an intention to undertake formative evaluation with the purpose of improving (Easterby-Smith, 1994), an intention to learn from*

experience to inform future practice for the next set of mentors and mentees.

However, the need to serve a socio-political function, based on KS's personal goal of ensuring the continuation of the scheme through influencing senior and line management opinion, became the primary aim when the circumstances changed.

7.4.2. Managerial Focus

Mabey *et al.* (1998) note the managerialist bias in the practioner literature which perpetuates the notion of the management perspective as pivotal in organisations and which assumes that all the parties involved subscribe to this view and accept the processes of authority and their consequences. This management focus or perspective was also exhibited by each of the sponsors (all of whom were managers) of the evaluation projects where the focus for the intended use of the evaluation was entirely upwards.

The primary motivation behind each evaluation was not as Bruce (1998, p. 56) suggests to provide closure to a project or to ensure that across the organisation 'learning takes place and to motivate people to be willing to participate actively in the future,' nor was it to develop innovation within the organisation through learning via communication as suggested by Forss *et al.* (1994). The intention of each sponsor was political, to use the evaluation findings to influence management thinking, decision-making and behaviour at higher levels of the organisation, for a specific purpose. In line with Easterby-Smith's (1994) view that individual manoeuvrings will have a bearing on how evaluation studies are used and interpreted, the sponsors in each case were quite actively focused on the significance of managing meaning in the political arenas where they could influence those above them and/or those who were in a position to support the sponsors' desired ultimate outcome.

Comment: *This created a barrier in the sense that the evaluation process became focused towards that purpose without any recognition at all in PVS or ABC, and limited recognition in NJD, of the impact that this might have in terms of the evaluation and the wider organisation. Numerous authors (for examples, see Buchanan and Boddy (1992), Carnall (1995), Kirkpatrick (1985)) describe the importance of sharing information and feedback in achieving successful change, not least so that an organisational ability to deal with new situations is developed (Pettigrew et al., 1992). Preskill and Torres (1999b) argue that the sharing of information is essential if new insights and mutual understanding are to be created. Yet, the need to share findings on a wider scale appeared very much an afterthought in each of the cases. In this context, the sponsors clearly did not accord equal status to each group of stakeholders, or indeed recognise all the potential stakeholders in terms of their inclusion, and there seemed to be little recognition in any of these organisations of the potential, or need, for shared learning or interpretation, particularly outside management circles. Preskill and Torres (1999b) suggest that in traditionally structured organisations (each of the three were essentially hierarchical in nature), employees have functioned independently, with little need to share beyond their circle or link their efforts with others, and it would it be interesting to test whether this managerialist focus and reluctance to share the findings occurred in organisations which were structured differently.*

The nature of HRM initiatives meant that, inevitably, in each case there were others who could claim to ‘have an interest and stake in the evaluation findings,’ (Patton, 1997, p. 354), at least to the extent of having the findings shared with them. Yet, until the questions were asked during this research project, there did not appear to be any

recognition that there might be a wider circle of interest. Indeed, surprise was explicitly expressed in both PVS and ABC that non-managers were actually interested in the evaluation process. An explanation for this lies in the intent behind these evaluations. Their end-focus did not relate to learning but to politics and persuasion in relation to other management groups. Nor had consideration been given to the need for a reciprocal relationship with those who had participated in the research. In PVS, no thought had been given to wider dissemination of information during the project and subsequent attempts to share the evaluation model were unsuccessful, resulting in its failure. At ABC, we had to insist that the report be sent to those who had participated and, while there was a greater awareness in NJD, even here, little thought had been given to this, particularly in terms of sharing the final outcomes.

***Comment:** Until the questions were posed, there was no apparent recognition that those who had volunteered to participate and had offered their views might feel that they were owed access to the findings they had helped create. In addition to creating dissatisfaction in respect of this evaluation project, this inequity of exchange was likely to create a barrier to future participation because the process had no perceived added-value for the individual and, as Fulop and Rifkin (1997) suggest, a lack of reciprocity or mutual self-disclosure can result in fear and a sense of threat which can, in turn, lead to concealment.*

Once the wider interest in the findings had been acknowledged in PVS and ABC, the instinctive, almost paternalistic, reaction of the managers was that the findings would need to be interpreted in some way before being shared, to help people understand and put things into perspective, not least because people may not have “*the skills or knowledge to think about things in a reasonable way,*” (PVS, liP Project Director).

There was also evidence that, beneath this desire to facilitate people's ability to understand, organisational defensive routines, as defined by Argyris (1986), were at work wherein the manager's automatic reaction was to ensure that, within the wider organisation, the presentation of the analysis did not embarrass, expose or threaten management as a collective group. It was certainly evident from the interviews that staff from the lower grades in both PVS and ABC expected there to be some selectivity and interpretation if, and when, any findings were shared with them, particularly if the findings were critical of what had been done. In NJD, perhaps in recognition of the predominantly professional nature of the people concerned, there was no suggestion that any interpretation would be necessary if findings were shared. Indeed summaries of the outcomes from the meetings with mentors and mentees had been circulated within those groups. Yet even here, the information gathered during the research interviews showed that people clearly did not believe that they had had access to the outcomes from other evaluation activities and felt that only certain findings, usually the negative ones, were shared with them.

Although Carr's (1994) suggestion that it was unlikely that managers would progress through a change programme without making some formative evaluation was disproved in the context of formal evaluation, it does hold true for informal evaluation. It was overwhelmingly demonstrated in each of these cases that individuals at all levels across the organisations were, as Calder (1994) suggests, actively making an evaluation of activities in which they were directly involved, observed or heard about from others. In accordance with the belief of Preskill and Torres (1999a), they were considering the problems faced by their organisations and had ideas about the solutions, both those already tried and others which might be feasible in the future, ideas which they had shared and debated within their own circles or communities-of-practice (Hendry, 1996). Certainly in the case of ABC the personal evaluation of the

initiative made by the majority was very positive and they felt quite strongly that empowerment had to continue. They were not prepared to accept a return to old practices, despite the apparent assumption by senior management that these could be reinstated should senior management so choose.

***Comment:** Paradoxically, the managers involved in the evaluations clearly recognised that individuals held views about the initiatives and sought to access these during the evaluation, yet, there seemed to be little recognition of how significant the impact of these informal evaluations might be, despite recognition by the managers of the power of their own informal evaluation processes. Of particular interest were the indications of an underlying difference between non-managers and managers in the degree of their acceptance of their own personal evaluations of situations that highlight a further barrier to formal evaluation. As Calder (1994, p. 16) notes we can only make an evaluation on the basis of the information to which we have access.*

The conclusions that we reach will be limited by the quality of that information, its comprehensiveness, relevance, up to dateness, accuracy.

Those who were not managers were conscious of the limited perspective on which they were basing their judgements and actively wanted to hear of other people's experience and interpretations of situations, to see the 'bigger picture'. The managers, however, appeared prone to pre-reflective reasoning, less willing to question their own interpretations or acknowledge the limits of their own knowledge (King and Kitchener, 1994). The managers in the case studies appeared to believe that, generally, the data provided by their own informal personal evaluations were sufficient in themselves.

***Comment:** This may have been because they felt their role in the organisation enabled them to take an overview and that they had access, through their position*

and networks, to a wide range of information. Easterby-Smith (1994) notes that managers, particularly at senior levels, have a preference for information received via their own informal information channels and this information tends to be far more influential than that produced via more formal channels. This belief of managers in the value of their own assessments can only be reinforced by the current climate in which, as Clark et al. (1998) observe, much of the popular management theory, and the change initiatives it inspires, supports an ideology of management, with managers cast as the heroes or heroines who make success possible (Clark and Salaman, 1998).

At the most senior levels, the adoption of the grand strategy approach and the unquestioned assumptions about the inherent goodness of the initiatives demonstrate the power of these informal evaluations, but it was not restricted to those in the top levels of management. In PVS, I was told that people pride themselves on being reflective practioners and some of those who participated in the recruiters' focus group felt that the organisation was being too critical of itself as it was clearly practising 'Fair Selection' (even though there was no concrete evidence to support this) and, therefore, the evaluation was unnecessary. In ABC, the sponsor had already assessed the success of empowerment on a personal level and, if it had been left to him, would not have evaluated at all because its value was "*manifestly observable*," a statement which assumes that everyone shares the same perspective. In NJD, the explanation given by one of the managers for not participating in evaluation meetings was *that "I think I knew enough about it,"* and the reason for the organisation not doing evaluation generally was that, in terms of assessing the effect of initiatives, changes, programmes "*we [managers] think we know anyway*," a statement sincerely rather than cynically expressed.

Comment: *In the context of busy and demanding organisational life, the role of most managers frequently requires that they have to make decisions/take action on the basis of their personal interpretation of limited information. On this basis, a predisposition to accept their own personal assessment as an accurate evaluation of outcomes and impact is understandable, particularly with the absence of any external incentives/requirements to evaluate further. Yet, Preskill and Torres (1999a, p. 48) warn that 'senior management can no longer rely solely on gut feelings and information from their inner circle to make decisions', and it was clear in each of these cases that there were other perspectives and opinions in relation to aspects of each of these initiatives; in PVS, some felt uncertainty about how successful the organisation truly was in its intent to be open and equal; in ABC, the doubts about the value and place of empowerment were the prime reason for the evaluation taking place; in NJD, there were differences surrounding the role of a mentor and the purpose of the evaluation itself.*

7.4.3. The Crisis of Verification

Organisational bias and uncertainty about assessing 'soft' initiatives led to a conflict of research perspectives that differed from the crisis of verification described by Legge (1984) and Patton (1978). Rather than difficulties caused by the incompatibility of academic requirements and the need for a pragmatic approach to research design as they describe, there was evidence of an incompatibility between the methodological bias of the organisation and the pragmatic needs of the evaluation research. Each of the evaluation processes considered here used qualitative approaches to data collection yet, in common with the organisations described in previously reported research (Skinner *et al.*, 2000), there was a definite bias towards quantitative measures and 'hard facts'. In both NJD and ABC, this reflected not only the organisation's past history but also the prevailing political climate at the time of the evaluation.

The initial intent in ABC had been to gather data for the evaluation through quantitative means, but the absence of objectives for the initiative and lack of any formative data made this difficult. The adoption of a qualitative approach was, however, largely a result of the sponsor being receptive to the consultants' views, based on their knowledge and expertise. It seems likely that primarily quantitative approaches would have been used if the evaluation had been conducted in-house, largely on the basis that the organisation was perceived to give more weight to quantitative results rather than any sense that quantitative measures were the most appropriate. In NJD, those interviewed felt that the organisational culture had moved towards hard, quantifiable measures and that there was a focus on "*number crunching*" (NJD Lecturer/Mentor), with no understanding of underlying explanations. This was reflected in the form-driven nature of measurement in the organisation that carried over into both the mentoring initiative and the evaluation, with the use of forms at five stages in the process to check progress and gather information. However there was some recognition of the limitations of a form-based approach in achieving understanding, which the Training and Development Manager (KS) sought to counter through group sessions with the mentors and mentees.

Of the three organisations studied, PVS was the least target- and measurement-oriented; indeed, there was evidence that people were target- and measurement-averse! Due to the nature of the organisation, there was also a greater awareness of the range of research methodologies that could be used in this type of project, yet even here, there was evidence of a quantitative orientation when any measurement had previously been done (training throughput, for example) and the performance indicators which were specified tended to express increases or improvements in purely numerical terms. However, this should not be overstated. While the liP standard required a

certain amount of quantitative data in terms of throughput and cost, the liP team's inclination from the beginning was to incorporate qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, to gather information. However, as in the case of ABC, the desirability of this approach was largely based on pragmatic concerns, as the absence of historical data meant any assessment of improvement or change over time could only be made on the basis of people's experiences and perceptions.

Comment: *The perceived difficulties and uncertainties relating to the evaluation of 'touchy-feely' initiatives found in the case studies reflects the current debates within the literature. Attempts noted in Chapter 2 by authors such as Delaney and Huselid (1996) to demonstrate a positive relationship between HRM practices and organisational performance or by various authors to identify collections of integrated HRM practices which significantly affect the firm's performance (Purcell, 1996) were unable to demonstrate conclusively the connections that were made and, as Guest (1999) notes, have done little to explain why this should be the case. These studies have also been subject to significant criticism on the basis of the methodology adopted (not least because 'hard-to-measure items get to be ignored' (Purcell, 1999, p. 29)) and claims of universalism that can be challenged (for a summary, see Purcell, 1999). When authors such as Torracco (1997) highlight the problems of disentangling the impact of HRM from other variables and Baruch (1997) identifies the difficulties involved in measuring the effectiveness of HRM and finds that the literature cannot offer any firm conclusions, it is hardly surprising that managers are still struggling. Indeed, one of the PVS managers remarked on the dearth of advice and guidance available in the management literature.*

7.4.4. The Choice of Evaluator

The significance of the choice of evaluator is emphasised by the central role of the evaluator in Kuipers and Richardson's (1999) consideration of the choices that need to be made about any evaluation process. Kyriakides and Huddleston (1999) also highlight the significance of the evaluator role, arguing the importance of recognising its *political nature and the desirability of an evaluator being eclectic*. The three evaluations exemplified the choices which can be made in terms of who should undertake an evaluation; PVS used a combination of internal and external evaluators which, based on PVS' own assessment, would also be defined as amateur (internal) and professional (external); ABC chose to use exclusively external consultants who, while trained in research methodologies, would not themselves claim to be professionally-trained evaluators, yet were viewed by the employing organisation in the role of 'expert'; the NJD evaluation was undertaken by the manager responsible for implementing the initiative who, by her own admission, had no previous experience of evaluating non-curricular activities.

Legge's (1984) crisis of accreditation referred to the legitimacy conferred on the evaluation process by the presence of an evaluator even when the process of evaluation is being influenced by those responsible for the change. The crisis of accreditation assumes that the evaluator possesses credibility which can be conferred upon the evaluation in the context of the relevant organisation, and certainly, each evaluator chosen was believed by those responsible for making the choice to bring credibility to the process in the terms required.

On the surface, pragmatic considerations such as lack of resources or expertise were responsible for the choice of evaluator made, particularly in PVS and NJD. In PVS, the perception of the necessary sequence of events set against the time and resources

available led to the conclusion that an input of additional resource was necessary, while in NJD, the low-key nature of the initiative meant that there was never any question of additional resourcing for evaluation. While these were genuine reasons, there were, in both cases, other less obvious factors contributing to the choices that were made. In PVS, there appeared to be a belief that the requisite expertise was not available in-house, and certainly no one was pushing to claim this responsibility, although in reality, there seemed little effort or inclination to explore this possibility and quite a lot of evidence to suggest that the expertise was there. In NJD, there seems to have been an underlying assumption that, in the same way that lecturers and course leaders were responsible for evaluating their own courses, so evaluation of the initiative would fall to KS. There seems to have been no thought given to the need for expertise or experience, which is a reflection of the low level of importance given to both this initiative and to KS in the overall scheme of things at that time. In ABC, the primary driver was the perceived need for a detached, unbiased, external assessment of the initiative, although issues relating to the availability of internal resources, expertise and the timing were also relevant to a lesser extent.

7.4.4.1 The Reality of Credibility

Of the three cases, only in NJD was the crisis of accreditation evident in the form described by Legge (1984). As an experienced member of staff in NJD, KS had personal credibility, widely acknowledged as important in the context of this initiative, and a good understanding of the history and culture of the organisation. Amongst those interviewed, all who expressed an opinion believed that she was an appropriate person to undertake the evaluation and that she had the necessary skills (although it should be noted that, for the majority, their experience was as limited as KS's) and that any evaluation she undertook would be fair and would identify the strengths and weaknesses of the programme.

Management within PVS and ABC felt that there was some benefit in an external, detached view, particularly if it was linked to an understanding of what was happening in other organisations, and the consultants chosen were felt, by management at least, to bring significant credibility with them. However, this was not a perception was shared by all, and staff in both organisations were sceptical about the extent to which those who were unconnected with the organisation could possibly understand the reality and add any value. In the case of PVS, the liP Project Team found that there were problems caused by the consultants being external to the organisational culture, not least the need to 'translate' documents for presentation to make them acceptable to committees and senior managers. Experience gained during the project led the liP Project Director to the conclusion that a member of the liP project team needed to accompany the consultants to enhance their credibility. In ABC, the use of external consultants detracted from the credibility of the project for some non-management staff who perceived their use as a means by which management could abdicate their responsibilities. Thus, contrary to Legge's (1984) prediction of evaluators lending unwarranted credibility to an evaluation, in these two cases, the presence of the chosen evaluator posed a threat to the credibility of the project rather than enhancing it.

7.4.4.2. Evaluator Bias

Within the literature, the desirability of evaluator independence is debated in terms of fairness, impartiality and accuracy and the degree to which the bias of dominant stakeholder groups may affect the findings. In NJD, and to a lesser extent PVS, the choice of evaluator and the nature of the relationship between the evaluator, the project and the organisation, created evaluator bias. In PVS, the issues of bias related to the evidence that the consultants hoped for further work (something that was recognised by the liP team and led to some cynicism) and thus were keen to provide whatever the client required because, as the liP Project Director remarked, "*they also have mortgages to pay*". The brief that that the consultants were given reflected the needs

of the dominant stakeholder group and they were continually guided by the representatives of that group towards meeting that remit. In NJD, evaluator bias was unrecognised as an issue; indeed the CE perceived KS as unbiased. However, although she genuinely appeared to want to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the scheme, KS had both created and implemented the initiative and strongly desired its continuation, albeit an improved and cost effective version. Thus, however good the intent, the degree to which she was truly unbiased must be questionable.

Comment: *In addition, as a manager who was not participating in the official management structure, who did not have access to senior managers or critical decision-making/information networks and who tended to be rather isolated from the development of systems and processes, KS was not involved at a level where any unconscious bias might have been challenged or at least uncovered.*

7.4.5. Utilisation of Findings

Although not a barrier to evaluation in itself the way in which the findings are used inevitably determines the effect, if any, that an evaluation has. Patton (1997, p. 20) suggests that evaluations 'should be judged by their utility and actual use,' and that it is the values of the primary intended users, those who have the responsibility to apply evaluation findings and implement recommendations that should frame the evaluation. In the context of these evaluations the primary intended users were clearly management and, while the long-term impact of the findings fell outside this research project, reflection on the short term will give some indication of the degree to which the evaluations were successful in Patton's terms.

In PVS the evaluation did provide evidence for the liP portfolio and raised the visibility of evaluation as an organisational issue while the project was underway. It did not,

however, provide a comprehensive evaluation of 'Fair Selection' nor provide a transferable evaluation model and the organisation failed to achieve liP status. In terms of serving its intended use this evaluation would appear to have failed. In contrast the ABC evaluation could be deemed a success, the Management Development Group warmly received the evaluation report and through the incorporation of its findings to support bids for other initiatives, the evaluation fulfilled the intention that it should influence thinking and enlighten a wider management audience about the real effect of empowerment (Patton, 1997). Similarly in NJD the evaluation provided evidence that could be used to promote and protect the initiative as the sponsor had hoped and intended.

7.5. The Significant Role of Informal Evaluation

In respect of both an HRM initiative and its evaluation, the extent and significance of the informal evaluation that takes place is clearly demonstrated by each of the case studies. What emerges strongly from the cross case comparison is the power of the informal evaluation that occurs at all levels of the organisation and the number of ways in which it implicitly impacts upon formal evaluation, not least in the creation, interpretation and acceptance of barriers to more formal evaluation. It is clear from the data that everyone involved in the initiatives had made their own personal evaluations about the issues relevant to them and that this influenced their actions, both current and future.

Comment: *Among those responsible for the initiation and implementation of the initiative (normally those who have control of the resources necessary to enable formal evaluation to take place), informal evaluation of the initiative and the context in which it occurred determined the perceived degree of need for formal evaluation to take place. Past experience, observation and shared perceptions suggested that formal evaluation activity was neither valued nor required by the*

organisation and was likely to have negative personal consequences. In addition, the initiative itself was informally assessed as something inherently good, which would inevitably benefit the organisation in some way, therefore making formal assessment unnecessary. On an individual basis, managers involved in the implementation of the initiative were making their own, informal, on-going assessments of progress and effect, which they deemed to be sufficient for their purposes. Others involved in the initiative, and in the wider organisation, had also made informal evaluations based on their personal and shared knowledge about the initiative, the need for formal evaluation and the evaluation process itself. These determined the degree to which they perceived the initiative and the evaluation to be worthwhile which, in turn, determined their degree of participation, their expectations in relation to any outcomes and the degree to which findings were/would be accepted.

7.6. Primary and Secondary Barriers

The evidence from the three case studies not only identifies a range of common factors which created barriers to formal evaluation in each of the organisations but demonstrates that these barriers fall into two distinct groups, those likely to prevent evaluation happening at all (primary barriers) and those that make it difficult for 'good' (thorough, unbiased, relevant) evaluations to take place (secondary barriers) and which will determine the extent to which useful findings are produced.

Patton (1997, p .26) argues the importance of evaluation being valued within an organisation, a status which he states cannot be taken for granted, and it is the perceived degree of value attached to the act of evaluation that is crucial in determining whether any evaluation takes place. Contextual factors, and their evaluation on an informal and personal basis by those who make the relevant decisions, are particularly

significant and form the primary level barriers which need to be overcome before an evaluation takes place.

Based on the empirical evidence the following factors are significant in any assessment of whether a formal evaluation is necessary:

- Previous experience of evaluation on an organisational and individual level (historical perspective).
- The extent to which evaluation is perceived to be a valued, priority activity in the eyes of senior management (historical perspective and strategic approach).
- The setting of performance measures and associated accountability for the initiative (strategic approach).
- Assumptions which are made about initiative itself (inherent value)

Table 7. 2 summarises the primary barriers and their contributory factors identified during the cross case comparison.

Table 7. 2 Primary Barriers and the Factors Which Created Them

Primary Barriers	Contributory factors
Evaluation activity of 'soft' initiatives believed to be difficult, not valued and to result in negative outcomes	Previous history of the evaluation of similar initiatives within the organisation and personal experience.
Absence of Senior Management requirement for evaluation	Previous history suggests 'soft' initiatives do not tend to be evaluated. 'Grand strategy' approach which means responsibility for evaluation not assigned.
Unquestioned assumption that the initiative is inherently beneficial to the organisation	Compatibility of initiative with cultural values, norms and desired image Similar initiatives promoted as 'successes' by the literature and by other organisations
Those responsible for implementation believe they have sufficient knowledge	Informal, personal evaluations of dominant group (management)

In PVS, ABC and to a lesser extent NJD, the contextual factors led to the conclusion on the part of those implementing the HRM initiatives that evaluation, other than at a quite basic level, was of doubtful, and certainly limited, value, unlikely to be positively rewarded and therefore time and resource were better expended elsewhere. It is not until circumstances change at this level, to the point at which the incentives to evaluate are perceived to outweigh the barriers that prevent it, that the secondary barriers assume importance. Before this point is reached, at most, the secondary level barriers serve to reinforce the decision not to evaluate.

In each of the three cases a change in the environment occurred which provided a sufficiently strong driver in favour of evaluation to overcome the primary level barriers. Once the decision to undertake an evaluation has been made the secondary level

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barriers become significant as they effect the extent to which the evaluation that is carried out is done well and proves useful.

Secondary level barriers are those which relate to matters of process and preference and the choices that are involved in an evaluation. Issues, such as establishing a clear purpose, choice of evaluator, research design, participation and use of findings become relevant only when it has been accepted that an evaluation is necessary.

There are factors at each stage that can contribute to the creation of barriers and each choice made has the potential to cause difficulties at a later stage. Thus the decisions made in each of these areas determine the ultimate utility of the evaluation findings. In each case, once the decision to evaluate had been made, other barriers arose both during the design and the implementation of the project, which, while not preventing evaluation from taking place, increased its perceived difficulty, and had implications for the use made of the findings. Table 7. 3 summarises the secondary barriers which were identified in these cases.

Table 7.3 Secondary Barriers and the Factors Which Created Them

Secondary Barriers	Contributory Factors
Absence of clear purpose	<p>Linear approach to change resulted in little thought being given to measures of success until the end of the initiative.</p> <p>The prompt that created the perceived need for a formal evaluation created an additional purpose to be served by the evaluation.</p>
Managerial Perspective	<p>Management are the dominant group within an organisation (in control of power and resources) and make decision to formally evaluate.</p> <p>Managerial focus does not recognise needs of other stakeholders</p> <p>Failure to recognise need for equity of exchange</p> <p>Organisational defensive routines</p>
Conflicting Research Perspectives	<p>Tension between needs of research (qualitative) and norm of the organisation (quantitative).</p>
Time and Resource Pressures	<p>Linear approach to change and 'Grand Strategy' approach meant that evaluation not considered until the end of the process leaving limited time and resource available to undertake an evaluation.</p>
Credibility of Evaluator	<p>External evaluator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Previous experiences of using external consultants- Perceived interest of evaluator in further work- Difficulties of an 'outsider' being attuned to the internal context <p>Internal evaluator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Assumptions based on previous history and current status of internal evaluator- Bias which exists when implementer is sole evaluator

7.7. Summary

In Chapter 2, I argued that, while the importance of evaluation of change is widely recognised within the literature, it is generally acknowledged to be a problem and to be an area to which organisations allocate insufficient time and effort. Yet, little is known about the barriers to evaluation that exist within organisations. In the context of change management and HRM, the processes involved in evaluating a change initiative have been the subject of limited exploration and are not well understood. From the cross-case comparison of the evidence it is clear that there are barriers to formal evaluation within organisations and that these are not confined to the evaluation process but may occur even before the implementation of the initiative has begun.

The barriers identified from the evidence can be divided into two types determined by the stage at which they took effect. Primary barriers are significant in preventing a formal evaluation from taking place at all and are created by a number of factors including the senior management approach to the initiative and the context in which it is conceived and implemented. Secondary barriers affect the decisions made and activities undertaken once a formal evaluation process has been embarked upon. In the case studies a number of barriers arose during the design and the implementation of the project which, while not preventing evaluation from taking place, increased its perceived difficulty, and had implications for its ultimate utility. Informal evaluation emerged as a significant underlying factor in all of the cases; it occurred at all levels of the organisation, was necessary for the provision of information for the formal evaluation process and was instrumental in creating both types of barrier. The empirical evidence clearly demonstrates that a variety of factors exist, not only within the evaluation process but also in the context of the organisation and the initiative,

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which pose considerable barriers to evaluation. The complexity of the issues identified positions the evaluation of initiatives as a challenging stage of the change process which requires forethought, planning and commitment from the highest levels.

Perhaps the most significant contribution that this research makes is that it addresses, and thus raises awareness of, a process that has been under-explored, despite being widely acknowledged as important in the context of organisational change, and bemoaned as something that is rarely done. More specifically the contributions to knowledge made by this study can be summarised in the following ways:

- *It adds to knowledge about the choices and decisions, and their consequences, involved in the evaluation of HRM initiatives by exploring the complexity of the process*
- *By confirming the existence of some of the barriers suggested by the literature but more importantly identifying other significant factors through analysis of the empirical research.*
- *The identification of two distinct categories of barrier: primary barriers which prevent evaluation taking place, and offer an explain of why evaluation rarely does take place, and secondary barriers that create difficulties which need to be addressed during the process if sound and useful findings are to be produced.*
- *Highlighting the significance and impact of the informal evaluations which occur at a variety of levels within the organisation, both before and during an*

evaluation process, and the apparently limited nature of management recognition of this contribution and its effects.

- Exposing an underlying managerialist perspective in relation to the evaluation of HRM initiatives, which inevitably has implications for the nature of these evaluation processes and the use of findings.
- Clearly demonstrating the relevance and transferability of the knowledge, experience and academic debates in the context of evaluation which exists within other disciplines.

Chapter 8 Conclusions

In this final chapter, the contribution and conclusions of the study are discussed in the context of the implications for both the theory and practice in the context of the evaluation of HRM initiatives. As explained in first chapter, the aim of this study was to identify the barriers to the evaluation of HRM initiatives that occur in organisations.

Through observation of real evaluation processes, the research sought to identify:

- The nature of the barriers which arose
- The factors which contributed to their creation
- The impact that barriers had on the evaluation process
- Contribute to the understanding of evaluation as a key aspect of human resource and change management

In addition to the management and business literature, work from the fields of education, health and social policy was used to identify possible issues and provide a background to the study. The primary intention was, however, to be open to whatever was to be found during the fieldwork. Chapters 4 to 6 described and analysed in detail the causes and effects of the barriers identified in each case study while Chapter 7 drew these together to discover the themes or ‘interesting generalisations’ (Remenyi *et al.*, 1998, p. 134) which emerged from a cross case comparison of the evidence.

8.1. Findings

Using the literature from other disciplines, such as education and health, in which evaluation has been more fully explored, factors with the potential to create barriers were identified and used as the starting point for this research. The intention of this study, however, was to explore the reality of evaluation in the context of HRM change

and identify the barriers to evaluation, and their causes, through observation of three such evaluation processes.

8.1.1. Barriers Identified

In each case study, a number of factors was identified which created barriers to the evaluation, some of which had been described in the literature (discussed in depth in Chapter 2) and had the effect predicted. Analysis of the case study evidence also identified 'new' barriers, many of which were created by factors that existed within the context of the initiative and the evaluation, an area under-explored in the literature, and which were significant in original decisions not to undertake formal evaluation (Table 8.1).

Table 8.1 Barriers Identified in the Case Studies

Barriers identified in the literature which appeared in the case studies	'New' barriers identified from the empirical evidence
'Grand Strategy' approach (Tichy, 1983)	Informal personal evaluation by key stakeholders of contextual factors
Linear approach to change ^{1*}	Absence of senior management requirement for evaluation
Absence of clear purpose (Patton, 1997; Easterby-Smith, 1994; Weiss, 1990).	Unquestioned assumptions about the benefits inherent in the initiative
Managerial focus (dominance of a single stakeholder group, Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Simons, 1984)	Informal personal evaluation by management during the implementation of the HRM initiative
Uncertainties about measuring 'soft' variables (technical issues raised by Lewis and Thornhill, 1994; Tichy, 1983)	Conflicting research perspectives in which tensions exist between the needs of the research and organisational preference (a variation on the crisis of verification identified by Legge, 1984 and the technical issues raised by Lewis and Thornhill, 1994; Tichy, 1983)
Bias of internal evaluator	Lack of external consultant credibility

Three barriers that were identified in the literature did not appear in the form predicted and/or have the anticipated effect:

- Hidden agendas - although there were hidden agendas in each case, rather than diverting the intended course of the evaluation, these agendas were important in creating the prompt for a formal evaluation to take place and

8.1. _____

¹ Although not specifically identified in the earlier literature as a barrier in Chapter 2 I had observed that the linear nature of much of what had been written about change had placed evaluation at the end of the process and suggested that this might form a barrier, something which was borne out by the empirical evidence.

therefore had a positive rather than a negative effect on the evaluation.

- The crisis of verification – rather than a methodological difference between managers and researchers as suggested by Legge (1984), the tensions that occurred in these projects were the result of the apparently conflicting requirements of a quantitatively-oriented organisation and the need for a qualitatively-oriented evaluation.
- The crisis of accreditation – in PVS and NJD, there was evidence that, at least in the eyes of some staff, the use of external evaluators had the effect of detracting from the credibility of the evaluation rather than conferring an inappropriate level of credibility on it, as the literature suggests.

There were also a number of barriers that appeared in the literature which were not present in the case studies: evaluation being perceived as backward-looking, the complexity of the change process and the difficulty of disentangling HR variables in order to assess them. Despite the negative associations attached to evaluation, the people in each case did not appear to view it as backward-looking but rather as an assessment of past activity which had a potential contribution to future developments.

In the context of these HRM initiatives, there was no suggestion that either the complexity of the change process itself or the need to disentangle HR variables in order to measure them created a problem in relation to evaluation. Perceived difficulties relating to measurement referred to tensions between quantitative and qualitative approaches, the lack of historical data and the amount of time and resource involved.

8.1.2. Primary and Secondary Barriers

The most significant conclusion from the study is that two levels of barrier exist, defined as primary and secondary in this study, which affect the evaluation at different stages. Primary barriers stem from contextual factors contained in the organisation's history, culture and the initiative itself, and the way in which key individuals perceive them. The combination of this interpretation of the subjective norm and the individual's own attitude towards evaluation, as demonstrated by the reasoned action model (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980), can dilute any perceived need for formal evaluation to take place and may well explain why, as Torracco (1997) states, formal evaluation rarely happens. These primary barriers relate to the organisational and individual value placed on the act of evaluating and the learning that occurs as a result of any findings, including the way that it informs the change. Unless evaluation is valued at senior levels and accompanied by the necessary incentives, resources and rewards, then wider perception of it as an important and valued activity is unlikely to become an active reality.

Secondary barriers are those which affect the evaluation process once the decision to evaluate has been taken and which, while they can provide additional support for the decision not to undertake formal evaluation, seem insufficient in themselves to prevent it happening. Lack of evaluation expertise, for example, may result in uncertainty about the importing of 'outside' expertise, technical issues or a poorly done evaluation, but, is unlikely in itself to prevent an attempt to evaluate formally once that decision has been made.

8.1.3. Informal Evaluation

Easterby-Smith (1994) observes that the evaluation process is a complex one that cannot be divorced from issues of power, politics, value judgements and human

interests, and so it proved in the three case studies. Although the research began with the intention of focusing on the formal evaluation process that took place, it quickly became clear that informal evaluation was a continual, ongoing activity that occurred at all levels and was a key factor in the creation of both primary and secondary barriers.

Yet, while recognising the power of their own informal evaluation processes, the managers in the case studies did not consider, or were unaware of, the potential effect of similar informal evaluations processes among non-managers. It was clear that all who were involved/affected by the initiative or the evaluation were making their own personal informal evaluations, not always at a conscious level, of the process, its impact and those involved, and these were often shared within peer groups or communities-of- practice (Hendry, 1996).

Pettigrew *et al.* (1991) argue the importance of influencing the conditions that will determine how situations are interpreted and the variety of points at which informal personal evaluations had a significant impact in relation to these formal evaluations merely serves to emphasise that. Yet, the managers in each of the cases appeared to be so focused on influencing those above them, there was little real appreciation or consideration of the informal evaluations being made by other staff, even though it was this informal evaluation that provided much of the data for the evaluation projects, or any real need to influence the conclusions being reached. Preskill and Torres (1999a, p. 51) argue that

at any one time most individuals in an organisation will have considered issues and solutions for the dilemmas facing their organisation - just as a matter of their own daily observations and reflections.

While this certainly appeared to be the case in the three organisations, those in the lower grades were clearly conscious that they did not have access to the 'big picture' and, therefore, many recognised the potential limitations of their conclusions. The

managers, however, were much more prone to pre-reflective reasoning (King and Kitchener, 1994) assuming that their sources of information were sufficient and their conclusions accurate.

8.1.4. Managerial Focus

Mabey *et al.* (1998) argue that the managerialist perspective, seeing the organisation and its workings from the management point of view, has been dominant in recent thinking about HRM but that it is not the real way that things are. Yet, the evidence of the three case studies suggests that, in the context of HRM initiatives, formal evaluation *is* undertaken from a managerialist perspective; it is a management activity, focused on the needs of decision-makers, wherein managers instigate the process and control the resources. Using Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980) Reasoned Action Model to consider contextual factors from a managerial perspective illustrates why the interpretation of these factors is the key to determining whether any formal evaluation takes place. In each of the three cases, the change in circumstances that created the perceived need for evaluation reflected this managerialist perspective. The focus was firmly on meeting management needs that, in turn, affected who participated, how they participated and the way in which findings were utilised.

Despite advocacy on behalf of other stakeholder groups by authors such as Guba and Lincoln (1994), in the context of organisational change it is only realistic to recognise that management inevitably forms the dominant group within organisations. As a group, managers have access to power, information and resources rarely available to other groups of staff. As was the case in the three organisations studied here, HRM change initiatives are generally instigated by management and any decision to formally evaluate will be made at this level because it *requires allocation of time, responsibility and resources*. Inevitably, this increases the likelihood that the nature of the process

and the use of any findings will reflect the management agenda, with little recognition of the contribution of other stakeholders.

8.1.5. Equity Of Information Exchange

The dominance of the management agenda led to a focus on process and outcomes that serve that agenda and failed to recognise or acknowledge the needs of other stakeholder groups who were providing the information on which the evaluation was based. The cases demonstrated that the sharing of information was important from the perspective of other stakeholders, however, its significance was unrecognised by the dominant stakeholder group who were perceived to filter, restrict and suppress findings thus, unintentionally, reducing future participation and levels of trust while missing opportunities to share learning and increase readiness for further change

8.2 The Implications

8.2.1 HRM and Change Management

The difficulties identified in the research assume an even greater significance if the assessments of the future role for HRM strategies and managers in change processes outlined in the literature are correct. Tyson (1999) notes that the literature frequently argues that the HRM function plays a strategic role in organisations and that HR managers are major players in creating organisational capability and in the management of change. Authors such as Purcell (1999), Tyson (1999) and Ulrich (1998) argue the importance of managing the HR side of change in order to 'improve an organisations capacity for change' (Ulrich, 1998, p. 124). Bowen and Siehl (1997) suggest that there is a discernable move in the field of HRM field towards a focus on issues of participation in which new challenges lie in building cohesiveness, enhancing 'soft skills' and reassessing importance of widely-shared values or strong organizational cultures and identifying ways of influencing the reinforcement or

creation of such cultures. Reflecting Bowen and Siehl's (1997) point, Tyson (1999) also suggests that HRM is now more concerned with process than organisational output and observes that a number of commentators argue that HR's contribution lies in the management of social process, largely because successful change management requires working at a level deeper than systems. Tyson believes that evaluation is an area where HR can make significant contributions, for

adjusting organisations to change can only be achieved through strategies. All these activities are aspects of the 'fit' of HR strategy to evaluation and an understanding of the appropriateness of interventions and change organisational strategy. (Tyson, 1999, p. 51)

Yet, the findings of this study suggest that a number of fundamental issues would need to be addressed and a number of barriers removed before these proposals could become a reality. Johnson and Scholes (1997, p. 494) argue that

organisations which successfully manage change, are those which have integrated their human resource policies with their strategies and the strategic change process.

However, it is clear that the issue of 'fit' between HRM and organisational strategies continues to pose problems for academics and practioners alike. There are difficulties relating to any assessment of the contribution of HRM, which are further clouded by the academic and practitioner literature, which promotes the perceived benefits of HRM strategies supported by simplistic prescriptions for success. The linear approach to the discussions of the change process in the management literature places the consideration of the evaluation at the end of a chain of events and rarely offers it the same depth of consideration that is accorded to the earlier stages of change, an approach mirrored by the reality discovered in these cases. Yet, Tyson's comment above clearly highlights the central role that evaluation could, and should, play in an environment where 'the amount of organizational change occurring ...is unprecedented' (Preskill and Torres, 1999, p. 42) and continuous. The evidence from the case studies is of a practioner need, and desire, for increased awareness and

guidance about evaluation issues and approaches, of which there is little available in the current management literature.

A key factor in any move to shape processes and culture, to build cohesiveness or to develop and promote shared values must be the sense-making processes of the individuals affected. In the context of change, Buchanan and Badham (1999) suggest that the management of change equates to the management of meaning and attempts to establish the legitimacy and credibility with other people of particular definitions of problems and solutions. Similarly, Reichers *et al.* (1997) in their consideration of the defensive role of cynicism and the expectation of failure based on past experience as a foundation for resistance, suggest that people need to understand not only the reasons for change but also its ongoing progress and its results. Such understanding is, however, inevitably dictated by the information which is available. The significance of informal evaluation processes in determining understanding at all levels of an organisation was strongly demonstrated in the research. In the formal evaluations observed here, however, rather than seeking to share knowledge and understanding within the organisation about the initiative and its impact, the primary focus was to produce findings to meet the political needs of the dominant stakeholder group. The needs and interests of other stakeholders were secondary, if indeed they were recognised at all.

While valuing the outcomes of their own informal evaluation processes, managers were instrumental in their attitude towards the assessments made by other stakeholders, using their views to provide information in the absence of 'hard' data but failing to recognise the need for equity of information exchange and the possible repercussions of suppressing or filtering findings. Yet, during the research, a range of views and opinions was expressed by those in the non-dominant stakeholder groups

that were not in accord with the expectations and conclusions held by managers and which affected the degree to which people were willing to participate in both the initiative and the evaluation process. This further illustrates the limitations and illusory nature of the managerialist perspective, the assumption that seeing the organisation from a manager's point of view reflects reality, found not only in these case studies but also in much of the HRM literature, for as Johnson and Scholes (1997, p 494) observe employees 'can both block strategic change and also be significant facilitators of strategic change'.

8.2.2 For Evaluation

Despite the importance of the evaluation of change having been recognised for more than three decades, it is widely acknowledged that evaluation is still rarely carried out (Torracco, 1997) and, within the UK, evaluation is the one area of the Investors in People (IiP) standard against which organisations are most likely to be found wanting (McDougall and Mulvie, 1997). What has not been clearly explained is why this should be so, why the norm in organisations has been that change efforts should be announced with great fanfare, yet, 'no announcement was ever made about the final evaluations' (Reichers *et al.*, 1997, p. 56).

Referring to management and business, Preskill (1998) wrote that 'rarely have people in this field looked to the field of evaluation for insights and knowledge about evaluation', a comment which offers both a partial explanation for the lack of guidance in the HR and change management literature and a conundrum. The exploration of the evaluation literature in the fields of education, health and social policy, undertaken as an initial basis for this research, identified a wealth of experience, knowledge and debate, developed over a thirty-year period, which had relevance in a management and business context. However, there was little evidence of this resource having been

accessed by those working in the fields of HR and change management, even though it offered ideas about the cause of barriers to evaluation and how they might be overcome. Nor was there evidence of similar empirical research and in-depth academic debate relating to evaluation in the management literature. Thus, there is limited knowledge and evidence on which to offer advice and guidance to organisations. The conundrum is why the transition of knowledge between the disciplines has not occurred, perhaps because academics have been as guilty as practitioners in undervaluing the role of evaluation, underestimating its complexity or have simply relegated its contemplation and exploration to end of the consideration of linear change process.

The negative perceptions of formal evaluation and its associations with blame and criticism are a significant barrier which needs to be overcome, one which, if widely held across other organisations, also has implications for the exhortations to pursue collective learning and to achieve the desirable characteristics of a learning organisation as a means of obtaining competitive advantage. As already noted, Bruce (1998) argues that evaluation, through helping to ensure that learning takes place, provides closure for a project and serves to motivate people to be willing to participate actively in the future. However, the managers in these studies did not view these evaluations as a real and valuable means of shared learning. Indeed, the circulation of outcomes, beyond meeting the intended political purpose, received little, if any, consideration, and, for them, closure could be achieved through their own personal evaluation processes. If, as Kuipers and Richardson (1999, p. 64) argue, every change is a unique process which can only be 'understood from the world of experience of the participants' and the 'added value of evaluation ... is determined by its capacity to interpret this unique process within a more general analytical and innovative

framework,' perceptions of the role and contribution of evaluation in this context need to change.

The three case studies reported here have highlighted that the complex range of issues identified in other literatures are also involved in an evaluation of an HRM initiative and demonstrated the relevance of those debates in this context. In addition, the research recognised the significance of the contextual factors relating to the organisation, the initiative and evaluation, in any decision about the necessity and desirability of the evaluation itself. Based on this empirical evidence, it has been possible to differentiate barriers into two categories and to offer an explanation, based on the identification of primary barriers, as to why evaluation, particularly of 'soft' change initiatives, is a rare occurrence. Having identified causes of difficulties in this research, it becomes realistically possible to move towards an exploration of possible solutions in future research.

8.3 Areas For Further Research

This research has been a limited study focused on three public sector organisations and it would therefore be desirable to extend the research to a greater number of organisations, both public and private sector, to test the extent to which these findings are both generalisable and helpful in understanding the barriers to evaluation.

Research in a greater range of organisations may also identify other significant barriers at either the primary or secondary level. The three organisations involved in this research had fairly traditional and hierarchical structures. This may be linked to the dominant managerial perspective that was identified, and it would be useful to explore this in organisations with alternative structures. Further research with senior management is also needed to explain why they fail to identify specific success criteria and a stated requirement for any formal evaluation at the outset of HRM strategies,

factors which appear so significant in determining whether any formal evaluation takes place at all.

8.4 Reflections On Experience

An inevitable part of the process of developing as a researcher is an increasing awareness of the limitations in a research design, some of which may be expected because of the methodological choices made (presented in detail in Chapter 3) and others which are a surprise, only revealed in the light of increased knowledge and understanding.

8.4.1 The Expected

The nature of a qualitative, case study based, approach inevitably contains within it certain limitations. It is a study of a small number of organisations and care must be taken in any attempt to generalise findings more widely, for the very strength of research which recognises the value of the uniqueness of circumstance and experience also necessitates caution in any suggestion that findings could apply elsewhere.

Gathering data based on an individuals experience and perception relies on the respondent willingness to be open and honest in the opinions that they express. It is important to recognise that some who choose to participate may do so to promote a particular point of view, to air a grievance or with the specific intention of distorting the research. Similarly, while offering a number of benefits, the use of focus groups carries the risk that the presence of others will affect the views that individuals choose to share, possibly resulting in a consensus view which can be both a dilution of the feelings of some while at the same time stating the point with a strength to which others would not subscribe. However skilful the interviewer, it is not always possible to

identify these effects at the time of interview although later analysis of data is likely to expose anomalies or extreme views which can be followed up.

The skill of the interviewer is important in establishing a rapport, in guiding the interview toward useful channels while at the same time allowing unexpected and interesting thoughts to emerge and be pursued. As an experienced interviewer, albeit not in a research context, I had already been trained in skills necessary to develop and maintain such interviews but am nevertheless conscious that, in the nature of all human beings, I might not always have been as successful or as effective as I might have wished.

The nature of a PhD thesis requires that it should be the work of an individual researcher and as such its nature and findings are inevitably the result of my interests, preferences and knowledge. Choices of approach, respondent, and issues to be pursued were made on the basis of my judgements and, as the primary instrument of analysis, I make no pretence that the results presented here are other than my interpretation of both the story the data had to tell and the way that this relates to existing knowledge. However, in order to achieve credible and consistent findings as recommended by the research literature, throughout the research and writing process I have been explicit about my own ontological and epistemological position and have used the literature and the respondents in each case as a means of maintaining an awareness of possible bias and have sought to understand the world as it is, to be true to its complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and to be balanced in reporting both confirming and disconfirming evidence (Patton 1990, p.55).

8.4.2 The Unexpected

As the product of both a positivist education system and the field of management, I realise in retrospect that many of my original ideas about research stemmed from the positivist, scientific approach and, while firmly believing in the appropriateness of the chosen non-positivist, qualitative stance and research design, this resulted in inner doubts and confusion about the research which took time to resolve. Influenced by this background I began with some and naïve assumptions about the role of researcher that proved inappropriate in this type of research project. With hindsight, I recognise that the role of researcher as I had originally envisaged it, was that of someone studying the subject from the outside (Evered and Louis, 1981) with no intention of participating or influencing what occurred. A stance that I quickly became aware was unrealistic and unhelpful. The fact of my presence at meetings inevitably had some impact, if only in that people were aware of an 'outsider' recording what they said. It also became clear that the questions I posed caused people to reflect on issues that they might not otherwise have done, and this may have impacted on subsequent actions or opinions. As each case progressed, it also became clear that some participants viewed me as 'expert' and sought advice and opinions. In these situations, my attempts to remain neutral were difficult to maintain without undermining rapport and trust that had been built up.

8.5 Final Thoughts

If, as the literature claims, the effective management of change and achievement of well-developed organisational learning strategies is the key to future competitive success for organisations, evaluation, both informal and formal, has a crucial contribution to make. By differentiating between primary and secondary barriers and their causes, this research has highlighted the complexity of the barriers that exist within organisations and demonstrated that each type of barrier has its roots in

different factors. These barriers need to be addressed in a variety of ways if they are to be overcome, and there is to be collective, and productive, learning from experience that moves the development of the organisation forward effectively and efficiently. It seems that a combination of previous experience and the informal evaluation process has led to a widespread perception that, in terms of the processes and data collection involved, evaluation is a difficult and time-consuming undertaking, particularly in the context of 'soft' HRM initiatives and qualitative research approaches. There are uncertainties and concerns which stem from the previous history of staff and organisations in which evaluation has been experienced as both a negative process, a vehicle for criticism rather than learning, and something held in low esteem by those in the most senior positions. The absence of detailed guidance, advice and examples within the management literature has simply served to reinforce these perceptions and is a gap which needs to be addressed.

On a personal basis during the process I have learnt a great deal about my own assumptions and interpretations of the world as I encounter it, about research and about the academic world, all of which are far more complex, problematic and challenging than I realised at the outset. Hopefully, as a result of the experience, I emerge as a more informed, skilled and competent researcher than I began. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that part of an increasing maturity as a research writer is to understand that no manuscript is ever finished and certainly in the case of a thesis such as this the price of learning is an increasing realisation of how much more there is to know and to include. There is a pragmatic point, however, at which a line must be drawn before the next stage can begin and so it is with this research.

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